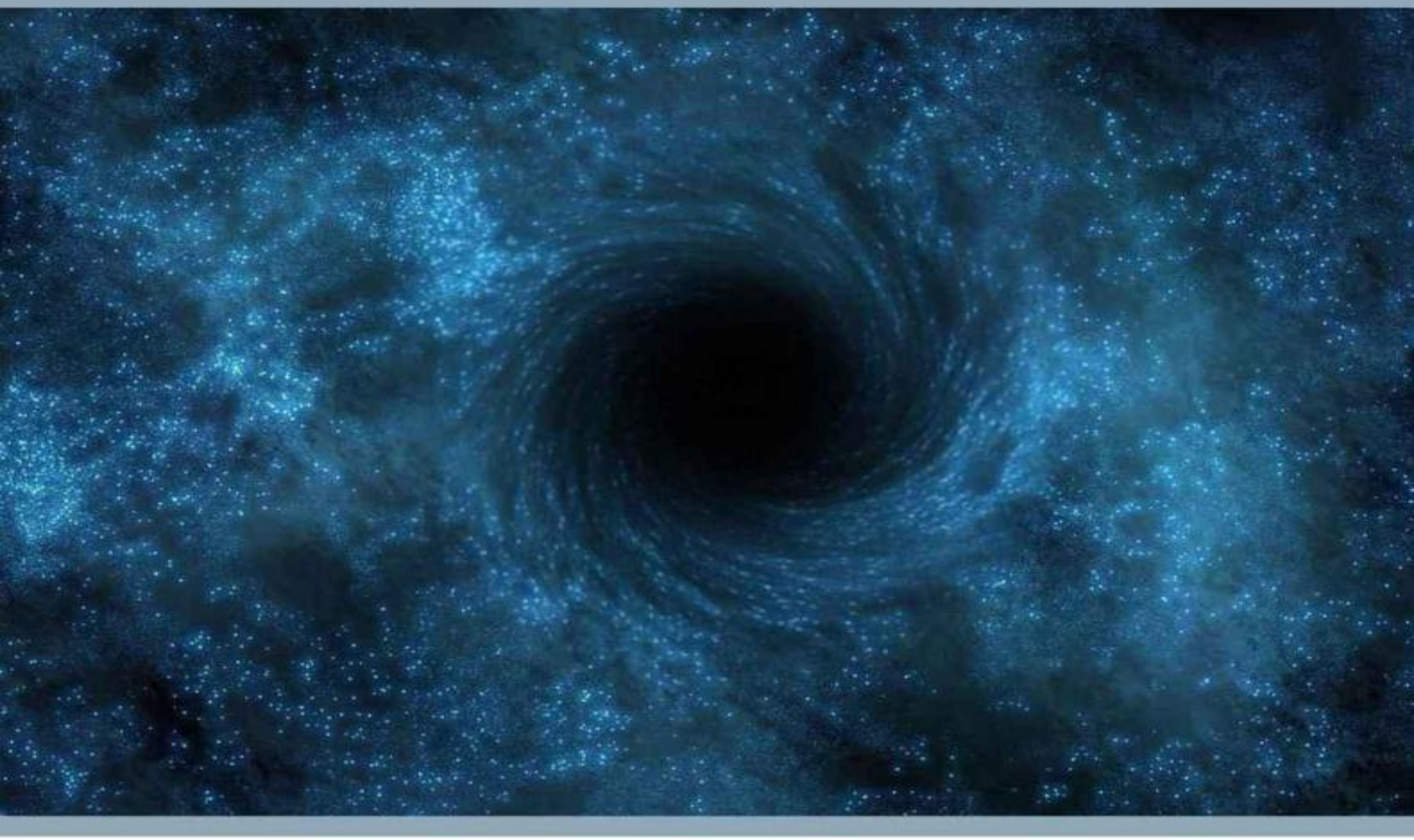
THERE WAS NO JESUS, THERE IS NO GOD



A SCHOLARLY EXAMINATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC, HISTORICAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL EVIDENCE & ARGUMENTS FOR MONOTHEISM

RAPHAEL LATASTER

there was no Jesus, there is no God

A Scholarly Examination of the Scientific, Historical, and Philosophical Evidence & Arguments for Monotheism

Raphael Christopher Lataster

Copyright © 2013 Raphael C. Lataster

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 1492234419
ISBN-13: 978-1492234418

“Not-knowing is true knowledge. Presuming to know is a disease.”

– Laozi

“Of course you are uncertain, Kalamas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kalamas, don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, ‘This contemplative is our teacher.’”

– Buddha

“I am better off than he is, for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows; I neither know nor think that I know.”

– Socrates

“But the kingdom is within you, and it is outside of you.”

– Jesus

~~~

Dedicated to Laozi, Buddha, Socrates, and Jesus.

Great teachers, whether they existed or not.
~~~

Contents

Preface

Part I: There was no Jesus

- Chapter 1: Problems posed by Biblical scholars and their methods
- Chapter 2: Problems posed by the sources
- Chapter 3: The earliest sources indicate a non-literal Jesus
- Chapter 4: Jesus' similarities to earlier characters
- Conclusion to Part I

Interlude: Mathematics demonstrates the implausibility of Jesus & God

Part II: There is no God

- Chapter 5: Three ways to prove God's existence
- Chapter 6: Philosophical arguments for God's existence always fail
- Conclusion to Part II

Conclusion: There was no Jesus, there is no God

Upcoming

Bibliography

Preface

It is not my job, intention, or desire to prove atheism true, whatever that means. It is not my job to disprove Christianity or any other religion. It is not my intention to destroy the faith of the faithful; nor do I desire to offend or upset believers in any way. As a scholar working in the academic field of Studies in Religion who specialises in the arguments for God's existence and who makes every effort to engage with the public, it *is* my job to examine the evidence/arguments presented by various religious apologists and to share my analyses with all those who care to hear it, in a concise, jargon-free and accessible format.

Though this book, like most of my scholarly work, will basically justify scepticism, and point to the humility and eventual unity that sceptical attitudes encourage, my personal position (which is irrelevant) is unique as I am an atheist who is 'rooting' for God. I would prefer the existence of a loving god, with or without the involvement of a peace-preaching, long-haired wearing, joy-bringing, water-walking, wise prophet. I would actually find it great if such peace-loving figures existed, and would hope that more would follow. It would be particularly convenient given that many of my relatives, friends, and fellow volunteer workers are Christians, Buddhists, Pantheists, Muslims, Jews, Pagans, and 'miscellaneous'. But this book is not about our wants, or the 'is religion good or bad for society' question; it is simply about the evidence. Like many people, I just want to know if particular religious claims are true. And the truth is not a democracy, and certainly does not care about our feelings.

Much can be said about the role evidence plays in religion. Many of my scholarly colleagues (even those who are atheists) would consider this sort of work to be 'vulgar', as they recognise the diversities of religions, and that orthopraxy (referring to practice or action) is often far more important than orthodoxy (correct belief). This may be the case, but this book is concerned with the *evidence*, and is clearly not intended as a broad attack on religion in general. Many of my fellow scholars would also roll

their eyes at issues that have already been resolved in their minds (though clearly not to an increasing number of new Evangelical scholars, and the general population), preferring instead to work with the ‘subtleties’ and ‘nuances’ of poetic and allegorical Biblical truths. Whatever that means. That’s great, but very much out of touch with Jane and Joe Public, who might just want to know ‘if it is true’ or not. Needless to say, there are religious believers who do claim ‘to know’ the truth. They find ‘the evidence’ crucial to their religious views. And this book concerns itself with such ‘evidence’.

Please note that the title of this book is intended to be somewhat ironic. We sceptics cannot prove a negative, whether it be the non-existence of Jesus, God, leprechauns, dragons, etc. Nor do we have to. All we need do, if anything at all, is carefully consider the evidence and arguments for the positive claim, and make rational decisions from there. For example, if I am faced with clear evidence for a particular God’s existence, I would convert. Going further, sceptics can actually produce arguments that more assertively oppose the claim (not that they have to), if not entirely disproving them; some of these will be discussed, though the focus of this book is the inadequacy of the evidence for the positive claims.

In Part I, the focus will be on Jesus. I will discuss the differing interpretations of Jesus (for example the divine, ‘Biblical Jesus’, and the non-divine and non-miraculous ‘Historical Jesus’), the problems with the methods/scholars involved, and the problems presented with the sources used to establish Jesus’ existence. It will become clear that the sources are so poor, that they cannot possibly constitute good evidence for the existence of the ‘Biblical Jesus’, and may even give us reason to doubt that any sort of Jesus existed at all.

In Part II, the focus shifts to God. We shall consider the ways in which a god’s existence could be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, and we shall then examine such evidence/arguments. Many different issues will be discussed here, such as the plausibility of monotheism, and ultimately, the key issue of Part I will be explained as the most relevant point of all. Rare is the religious believer who wishes to prove the existence of merely *some*

God. They wish to argue for their specific God. With Christianity at least, any evidence/arguments for the existence of a specific God tend to revolve around Jesus.

This book will undoubtedly touch on beliefs that many people hold dear to their hearts. The conclusions of this book could prove upsetting. I cannot stress enough that the intent is not to cause grief or to eliminate religion. I support peoples' rights to believe in whatever they feel they need to believe in, in order to successfully navigate their – often complicated – lives. But this is a book about the evidence, and we shall be examining religious evidentialists' claims critically.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the various scholars who have so generously offered me their support and encouragement during the creation of this book, and the master's dissertation and peer-reviewed journals articles that preceded and formed the basis of it. To Rod Blackhirst, Hector Avalos, Robert M. Price, Richard Carrier, Graham Oppy, Peter Slezak, David Nicholls, and Herman Philipse, I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. Most of all, I wish to thank my mentor, Carole M. Cusack, whose support made this venture possible, and enabled me to fulfil my dream of working in the public service. May she never thirst.

About the author

A former fundamentalist Christian, Raphael Lataster is a professionally secular PhD researcher (Studies in Religion) at the University of Sydney. His main research interests include philosophy of religion, sociology of religion, Christian origins, logic, epistemology,

Bayesian reasoning, justifications and social impacts of atheism, Taoism, overpopulation and sustainability concerns, pantheism, and pandeism. Being passionate about education, Raphael hopes to eventually teach in Religious Studies and possibly Philosophy (critical thinking and philosophy of religion), and also to make every effort to engage with the public, through popular books, speaking engagements, public debates and websites. His other interests include rock-climbing and volunteering with the State Emergency Service.

Raphael wrote his Master's thesis on Jesus mythicism (the view that even a 'historical', non-miraculous Jesus may not have existed), concluding that historical and Bayesian reasoning justifies a sceptical attitude towards the 'Historical Jesus'. For his doctoral work, Raphael is analysing the major philosophical arguments for God's existence (as argued by William Lane Craig, Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga and Thomas Aquinas), attempts to demonstrate the logical implausibility of the monotheistic concept, explores the theological tendencies of Philosophy of Religion, considers the plausibility of pantheistic worldviews, and ponders the sociological impact of certain sophisticated apologists, such as Craig, whom he dubs the 'New Theologians'.

Please note that this is not an appeal to (my) authority. The qualifications, intelligence, character, popularity, sexual appeal, etc. of the arguer is not what is truly important; it is the arguments themselves that matter. This book focusses on the arguments; on the evidence. Please also note that I have involved (as supervisors, examiners, and unofficial advisors) world class scholars in this big project, from academic fields such as Philosophy, History, Biblical Studies and Studies in Religion. As this is essentially the 'popular book' version of my professional, scholarly, and peer-reviewed work so far, we shall ignore typical scholarly restrictions regarding personal language, contractions, exclamation points, and humour. Let's get to it!

Part I: There was no Jesus

Many people believe in what I call the Christ of Faith, or the Biblical Jesus. This is the Jesus that was divine, performed miracles, died for our sins, and was resurrected, by Yahweh, the Judeo-Christian god. There are of course many versions of this basic idea, but generally we can lump them altogether under the moniker, ‘Biblical Jesus’. According to believers in the Biblical Jesus, the Bible is basically accurate, even in its descriptions of supernatural events.

Many others, particularly atheists and secular Biblical scholars (those few that are not Christians), believe that some sort of Jesus existed, but reject the alleged divinity, miracles, the resurrection, etc. Though there are many versions here as well, for convenience, I lump them altogether under the moniker, ‘Historical Jesus’. The mainstream view is that the populace tends to believe in the Biblical Jesus, while objective scholarship believes in the Historical Jesus. There is a big problem here. The existence of both of these Jesuses is proclaimed through the very same sources. Sources, that most scholars agree, are not perfect and accurate sources of historical knowledge.

There are also those that believe Jesus did not literally exist in any form, a view typically called the Jesus Myth Hypothesis (JMT). These are often called ‘Jesus mythicists’ or ‘Jesus ahistoricists’ (as opposed to the ‘Jesus historicists’ mentioned above). According to this minority view, everything we think we know about Jesus is a myth, and he did not (or at least possibly did not) exist at all. I wish to avoid certain aspects of this controversial topic, and focus all energies on the methods used in scholarly Jesus studies, the scholars themselves, and most importantly, the sources. Only after that is done, can we draw rational conclusions about Jesus. Before we start our examination, a brief and honest quotation from notable Bible scholar, R. Joseph Hoffmann:

> I think the historicity question, as I have said many times over, is an interesting one. But it is not a question that in the absence of a “real” archeological or textual discovery of

indubitable quality can be answered.[1]

Chapter 1: Problems posed by Biblical scholars and their methods

Before we begin our sober and scholarly investigations on Jesus, we shall consider the scholars, their methods, and why their claims are based on foundations of sand. Firstly, the majority of Biblical scholars are Christians. To the non-Christian, this would seemingly be a massive problem, as such scholars clearly have every incentive to promote the authenticity of the Biblical Jesus. Note that even non-Christian scholars may have motives to be sympathetic towards Christian views, given their position in the field, and the ultimate source of their funding. As American writer and social critic Upton Sinclair wisely realised, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it!" The minority non-Christian Biblical scholars (generally taken more seriously by secular – i.e. 'real' – scholarship), reject the Biblical Jesus, and tend to champion the Historical Jesus. Curiously, they use the same sources. Stranger still, all these scholars have numerous views on Jesus. This is a bit of an embarrassment for Jesus scholarship, as top Biblical scholar, JD Crossan remarked:

> But that stunning diversity is an academic embarrassment. It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography.[2]

As the sources these various scholars use are the same, there must be something fishy going on with their methods, either in the methodological tools themselves, or in how the respective scholars use them. It is thus crucially important to consider these methods, which help shape the conclusions of the experts.

Sources consulted for this project

Many top scholars will be referred to, with three modern scholars in particular: New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, theologian and former

minister Robert M. Price, and historian Richard Carrier. All three have had recent books published on the JMT,[3] which summarise current and previous research, with Ehrman rejecting it (he argues for a non-divine Historical Jesus), and Price and Carrier supporting it. Though I try to avoid arguing for the JMT, as it can unnecessarily necessitate the sceptic accepting the burden of proof, the very *possibility* of the JMT does considerable damage to claims about Jesus' divinity and resurrection. If we cannot be certain that even a Historical Jesus existed, surely we can be less certain that the Biblical Jesus existed!

These scholars also provide potentially counter-intuitive perspectives: Ehrman is an atheist (formerly a Christian) who believes in a historical Jesus, Price is a Christian who promotes the JMT, while Carrier is a sceptical historian previously critical of the JMT. However, after examining the sources and arguments himself, Carrier now concludes that Jesus mythicism is more likely. Ehrman is a noteworthy liberal scholar and best-selling author, Price is a fellow of the notorious Jesus Seminar and the Jesus Project, while Carrier specialises in philosophy, mathematics, and ancient history.

The collection of writings of the Judeo-Christian New Testament is a major source for information on Jesus, and English translations shall be consulted extensively. Unless otherwise noted, the New International Version (NIV) shall be utilised. Little time will be spent examining hypothetical sources or sources that have not survived to the present day, such as *Q* (a hypothetical source document for the gospels of Matthew and Luke), other alleged oral traditions, or the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. The reason for this should be obvious. This research shall be limited to sources that actually exist, and sources that modern scholars have access to.

The historical method

When undertaking a historical project, sources should be examined according to historical methodologies used to determine the trustworthiness and accuracy of primary and secondary sources. From the start, this may present somewhat of a stumbling block. There are various

methods, and not all historians agree. History is arguably more of an art than a science; it could generally be agreed that history cannot be definitively proven and is really concerned with trying to determine what *probably* happened in the past, because knowing what *actually* happened is impossible.[4]

A brief consideration of the reliability of documents written or compiled by mere mortals reveals that there is a substantial difference between the certainty of any historical approach and the certainty of perhaps the purest of sciences, mathematics. It is easily argued that nothing in history can truly be known with absolute certainty; there is always room for some measure of justifiable doubt. However, a few methods and tools supplied by various historians do prove useful in research on Jesus. Methods used by historians in examining the reliability of the textual sources for example, are crucial in historical Jesus studies.

The question of Jesus' existence is a historical question, as well as a theological one. As such, this is a question that can be asked without being restrained by respect to the billions who proclaim Jesus as their saviour, or the respect accorded to Christianity for its influence on Western culture and academia. For the purposes of this project, general principles of historical research and critical thinking shall apply; there will be no special treatment given to certain texts or noteworthy figures. Certain methods and arguments by scholars might be examples of logical fallacies, and this shall be revealed. An over-reliance on scholarly opinions, rather than a direct examination of the evidence for example, might be committing the fallacy of *appealing to authority*. A conclusion not flowing from the premises presented demonstrates the fallacy of *non-sequitur*. When possible, the evidence shall be examined critically, along with considerations of scholarly opinions. It was earlier noted that the JMT is considered 'fringe' in Biblical scholarship. Relying on this assertion is committing the logical fallacy of *appealing to the majority*, and will not be taken as evidence against the JMT.

Sources of evidence used in historical research are often classified as being primary or secondary sources. Primary sources would generally be physical relics (such as artefacts) or testimonies (such as written

documents) created by eyewitnesses (including the person in question), contemporary to the events in question.[5] One thing that historians do seem to agree on is the importance of primary sources which, unlike secondary sources, are *direct* sources of evidence. Hugely influential nineteenth-century historian Leopold von Ranke preferred the use of primary sources, stating that historians ought to rely more on narratives of eyewitnesses, and on genuine and original documents.[6] As primary source evidence is closer to the events in question, and presumably more reliable, primary sources are of the utmost importance to scholars investigating claims about Jesus. The major primary and secondary sources used in Jesus studies will be discussed in the next chapter.

It then becomes necessary to describe how the primary and secondary (non-direct) sources shall be analysed. It should be noted that while primary sources are generally superior, they also could be affected by bias and inaccuracies. Richard Carrier on why doubt is a prerequisite in historical research:

> Evangelical apologist Craig Blomberg argues that one should approach all texts with complete trust unless you have a specific reason to doubt what they say (*The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 1987, pp. 240-54). No real historian is so naive (see Bibliography). I am not aware of any ancient work that is regarded as completely reliable. A reason always exists to doubt any historical claim. Historians begin with suspicion no matter what text they are consulting, and adjust that initial degree of doubt according to several factors, including genre, the established laurels of the author, evidence of honest and reliable methodology, bias, the nature of the claim (whether it is a usual or unusual event or detail, etc.), and so on.[7]

When it comes to a primary source (or perhaps any source), questions historians may ask to determine its usefulness may revolve around when the source was produced (date), where it was produced (localisation), by whom it was produced (authorship), the pre-existing material influencing the source (analysis), the original form of the source (integrity), and the evidential value of the source's contents (credibility).[8] Influential twentieth-century historian Louis Gottschalk, in his work *Understanding History*, gave some insight into how secondary sources can be tested by the historian:

> In cases where he uses secondary witnesses, however, he does not rely upon them fully. On the contrary, he asks: (1) On whose primary testimony does the secondary

> witness base his statements? (2) Did the secondary witness accurately report the primary testimony as a whole? (3) If not, in what details did he accurately report the primary testimony?

While the answers to these questions may not provide complete certainty as to how reliable documents are in reporting what actually happened, they do aid in determining to what extent a source could be trusted. As such, the sources used in Jesus studies will be subject to these questions. Apologists might argue that such standards should only apply to more modern sources; that modern scholars should not have such high expectations of ancient sources. Whether ancient sources should be judged according to the standards set for more modern sources can be debated, but the answer must ultimately be 'yes'. The historian must be critical and consistent. The historian must accept that ancient sources may provide limitations and challenges, and not arbitrarily change what is considered to be convincing evidence, simply because it is already known that the evidence provided is not convincing…

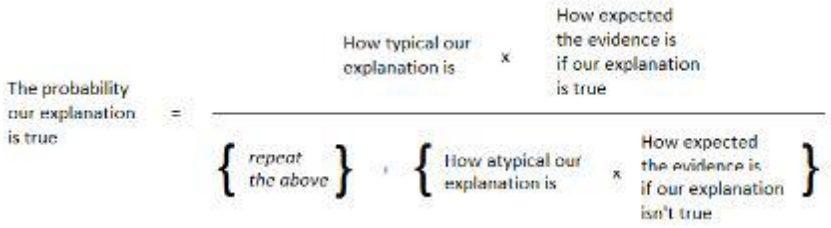
Historians cannot lower the standards by which they measure a source's reliability, simply because they already know, due to the time period in question or for other reasons, that the source is relatively less reliable; even if this is what Biblical scholars actually do. That would be inconsistent and its practice indicates bias. Scholars could then proclaim any source reliable. If that means historians can say nothing of the ancient world with certainty, then so be it! No evidence is no evidence and weak evidence is weak evidence; whether historians should reasonably expect strong evidence or not. As Biblical scholar Robert Price affirms, there is no way to be certain, and scholars should not bemoan that fact.

Bayesian methodologies

The hands-down best way to reason about… well, just about everything. This will be explained further in the interlude between Part 1 and Part 2, but we shall briefly examine its historical use here. Bayes' Theorem is a scary-looking mathematical formula which is incredibly useful in determining probabilities, and thus, is useful in historical studies. Remember, history is not about what happened, but what *probably*

happened. That's right, History, generally considered to be part of the Arts & Humanities, is actually *mathematical* in nature! One scholar who understands this is Aviezer Tucker, who unashamedly promotes the use of Bayesian methods in historical studies, in *Our Knowledge of the Past*. In his book, *Proving History*, historian Richard Carrier implies that Bayesian methods are superior to any other, and can be used to cast doubt on just about everything about Jesus, including his very existence.

Carrier knows that nothing can be known of history with certainty, especially with regards to Jesus who provides little and problematic evidence, and that historians must be comfortable with ambiguity. An 'agnostic' (not knowing) position is asserted to be a very common result in historical studies. Noting that 'possibly, therefore probably' is fallacious, Carrier claims that mainstream historical Jesus scholars have not done their job competently.[9] He argues that the solution is Bayes' Theorem, and that all valid historical methodologies already conform to it, presenting it in a very useful natural language format:


The probability our explanation is true
=
How typical our explanation is
x
How expected the evidence is if our explanation is true
{ repeat the above }
,
{ How atypical our explanation is
x
How expected the evidence is if our explanation isn't true }

This calculation relies on the probabilities of the truth of the theory considering background knowledge, and considering the evidence in question. Crucially, this equation takes into account alternative theories that fit the evidence, while Biblical historians may have been guilty of only addressing contradicting evidence to their particularly theory. None of this is foreign to the (good) historian, though Biblical scholars may be guilty of ignoring the latter, hence the many differing theories on who Jesus was, and if he even existed historically.

Using Bayesian reasoning encourages historians to consider other theories that fit the evidence just as well (or better), and can force them to be transparent with their claims by assigning quantitative values. For example, a certain scholar might be a major supporter of theory *x*, which

has a 72% chance of explaining the evidence. When employing Bayes' Theorem however, the same scholar realises that theory *y* has an 87% chance of explaining the evidence; there can be no hiding from this inescapable conclusion. When using Bayes' Theorem, the historian will no longer be allowed to pass off a merely possible theory as one that is probable, or almost certain; the numbers simply cannot lie.

Those who are sceptical of applying a mathematical approach to the arts are easily answered. History relies on probabilities, which are mathematical, even when numbers are not explicitly used. 'Even odds' means 50% for example, 'improbable' might mean 20%, 'very probable' could mean 95%, while 'more than likely' would mean greater than 50%. Bayes' Theorem just makes the process more transparent; what was once said intuitively can now be asserted mathematically. Carrier further explains how all valid historical methodologies (such as the argument from evidence and the argument to the best explanation) already conform to and/or are superseded by Bayes' Theorem, and those that do not are not logically valid.

It would after all be very difficult to convince a competent historian that considering background knowledge and alternative theories is not good historical methodology. Carrier then uses Bayesian methods to show that the *authenticity criteria* used to authenticate sayings and deeds of Jesus are either invalid, inappropriately used, or superseded by Bayesian reasoning, which is explored further in the next section. Bayesian methods allow us to objectively compare how revealed evidence fits various theories, and thus could be very helpful in Jesus studies.

As mentioned earlier, this book's interlude shall explain how Bayes' Theorem can help us form rational conclusions about Jesus, God, UFOs, and essentially, everything. Unfortunately, the methods used in Biblical scholarship aren't particularly Bayesian. So let's now look at how Biblical scholars generally do go about their work, when it comes to research on Jesus.

Methods of Biblical scholarship

Now we shall finally discuss common methods used by Bible scholars in Jesus research, and why they are not so helpful. We shall look at how they are even coming under attack from scholars within the academic field of Biblical Studies. Archaeologist and Biblical scholar David Noel Freedman once remarked:

> We have to accept somewhat looser standards. In the legal profession, to convict the defendant of a crime, you need proof beyond a reasonable doubt. In civil cases, a preponderance of the evidence is sufficient. When dealing with the Bible or any ancient source, we have to loosen up a little; otherwise, we can't really say anything.[10]

It is interesting to see how a respectable Biblical scholar acknowledges that the evidence scholars extract from the Bible is not ideal. When it comes to the canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), secular New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman agrees.[11] Noteworthy JMT proponent Robert M. Price also agrees, saying that using critical tools with ruthless consistency would leave scholars with complete agnosticism with regards to Jesus' historicity.[12] There are many methods used in Biblical studies, but of particular relevance to this project are the tools or *criteria* used in establishing authenticity with regards to the sayings and actions of historical Jesus. Gager identifies and criticises the circulatory methods of Biblical scholars, particularly these *criteria*:

> A more serious problem is the patent circularity of the method in dealing with the Gospels. Apart from Paul, who says precious little about Jesus, the sources for our knowledge of early Christian communities are identical with the sources for the quest itself… it is difficult to see how else one might proceed responsibly to distinguish between "history" and "tradition" in the Gospels.[13]

Criteria of authenticity

The *criteria of authenticity* are tools used by Bible scholars to judge the reliability of certain aspects of the Bible, such as a particular teaching, or story. Here is a discussion of the main criteria, and how they themselves, or the way they are used, result in uncertain conclusions.

Multiple attestation: The more independent references to an event, the more likely it happened. While generally a logical principle, its use by Biblical scholars in establishing Jesus' historicity could be invalid, due to the scarcity of sources and the timelines involved. Few individual units of the Jesus tradition are multiply attested, and even then, establishing independence is incredibly difficult.[14] The Gospels are reliant on each other (particularly on Mark) so may not actually be independent, hypothetical and non-existing sources such as *Q*, *M* and *L* (and even second and third-generation hypothetical and non-extant sources behind these sources) cannot be used to determine anything with certainty, the writings of the Apostle Paul mention little about the events of Jesus' life (and could indicate a Jesus that was not on Earth recently), while extra-Biblical (outside the Bible) passages appear later in the record, are disputed, and cannot be ruled out as being influenced by Mark and the other Gospels. Gager theorises that a tradition's multiple attestation "will not establish anything beyond its early date."

As Richard Carrier notes, scholars cannot presume multiple independent attestation when the authors of the Gospels are anonymous, and present additional problems:

> All we have are uncritical pro-Christian devotional or hagiographic texts filled with dubious claims written decades after the fact by authors who never tell us their methods or sources. Multiple Attestation can never gain traction on such a horrid body of evidence. [15]

Embarrassment/dissimilarity: The criterion of embarrassment, along with the similar criterion of dissimilarity (sometimes known as the criterion of double dissimilarity) supposedly indicates that if a saying or event found in the Jesus story is embarrassing to Jews, early Christians (including the Gospel writers), or both, it is likely to be true. The idea seems rational in the sense that it could be unlikely for a scribe or church for example, making up an event or teaching that they would find embarrassing. This criterion is highly speculative.

Firstly, it could be possible that the author purposely provides an embarrassing example to make a point (perhaps on humility, or separation from the ego),[16] or to provide a feeling of authenticity and credibility,

avoiding suspicion over constant positive assertions. In other words, a mixture of truth and lies is often more believable than straight lies. Secondly, given the diversity of Jewish religions, and the diversity even of early Christianity, it cannot be assumed (with the canonical Gospels at least, with their anonymous authors) that the author would find the event or teaching in question to be embarrassing. Biblical scholar Christopher Tuckett argued that "The very existence of the tradition may thus militate against its being regarded as 'dissimilar' to the views of 'the early church.'"[17]

Philosopher Stephen Law generally dismisses the authenticity criteria as applied to the Gospels, noting that they cannot be used to establish details about Jesus, such as his very existence, and could only be helpful if scholars already knew of a historical Jesus (from external sources) and were certain of some of his teachings and deeds. With regards to the criterion of embarrassment, Law rightly mentions that it is not unheard of that a new religion would make embarrassing and untruthful claims, pointing to the fantastic and embarrassing (to modern understanding of science and history) claims of intergalactic wars made by Scientology founder, L. Ron Hubbard.[18] New Testament scholar Stanley Porter describes determining what might have been embarrassing to early Christians as "very difficult… due especially to the lack of detailed evidence for the thought of the early Church, apart from that found in the New Testament."[19]

As with Tuckett, Carrier agrees that the very fact a tradition of Jesus survived (in the Gospels) is actually evidence that that traditional saying or deed *is not dissimilar* to what early Christians believed.[20] It does seem illogical to proclaim that a Gospel author is writing stories that contradict what early Christians believed, when the Gospel authors themselves were early Christians, and among the earliest Christians on record; from which later Christians would derive their faith! Carrier also notes that any reason to preserve a supposedly embarrassing and truthful passage (which could have been altered or removed by over-eager scribes) would also be reason to fabricate the passage; indeed, that the supposedly embarrassing stories suited some purpose of these early Christians, might

even point to their being made up. Gager alludes to the difficulties posed by the incomplete understanding of 'the early Church':

> It may well be the case, in the words of Hooker, that "if we knew the whole truth about Judaism and the early Church, our small quantity of 'distinctive' teaching would wither away altogether."[21]

Coherence: This criterion indicates that a saying or action of Jesus is more likely to be authentic, if it coheres with other authentic sayings and actions of Jesus. A clear problem with this criterion is in establishing a base of authentic sayings and actions. With a lack of primary sources, and anonymous authors for the main secondary sources of information about Jesus (the canonical Gospels), finding what is authentic about Jesus is extremely difficult (if not impossible). This criterion relies heavily on assumptions.

Without a solid base of certain sayings and deeds that do stem from a historical Jesus, using this criterion would be circular and we would be relying on other criteria, as stated by Stanley Porter, who also notes that when it comes to the criteria for authenticity, "each of them seems subject to valid criticism". Nor is it impressive if sources that could borrow and evolve from each other show signs of 'coherence'. It is obvious that coherence can be fabricated, especially when the documents in question are separated in time, often by decades. Gager also criticises this criterion, alluding to the "floodgate" of improbable claims that are consistent with other information:

> To allow a saying that is simply consistent with or does not contradict another saying is to open a floodgate, for the range of such a criterion is virtually limitless.[22]

Vividness of narration: A story's vivid details could supposedly indicate it to be an authentic eyewitness report – at least that's what Biblical scholars like to believe. This is very speculative, with New Testament scholar Craig A. Evans calling it "dubious".[23] A genuine report could be very brief, and it could be unnecessarily long, depending on the eyewitness; and there is a big issue here, with the Gospels having anonymous authors. A fictitious report could also be brief, or exhaustively detailed.

Tolkien's decades long work on his *Middle-Earth* saga for example, whilst providing entertaining stories for novels and films, does not prove that the One Ring that ruled them all was indeed destroyed, or that certain sayings really did originate with a historical King Aragorn, Bilbo Baggins, Samwise the Brave, or Gandalf the Grey; in fact vividness would be expected of fiction. Are we to assume that because the *Harry Potter* books are so vividly described, that some elements of it (such as Harry's early and depressing life in London) must be historically accurate? This criterion also directly contradicts the criterion of **least distinctiveness**. If less vivid and more vivid descriptions both point to authentic deeds and sayings, scholars could 'authenticate' any aspect about any Jesus, or any other historical or mythological figure.

Another dodgy criterion is the criterion of the **crucifixion** which generally assumes that Jesus was crucified, and also assumes that he did indeed exist historically. Employing this criterion is to commit the fallacy of begging the question. Another pair of potentially contradictory (yet also complementary) criteria would be the criterion of **Greek context** and the criterion of **Aramaic context**. Why assume that Greek or Aramaic context would indicate that the tradition originates from Jesus, rather than the Greek or Aramaic-speaking Gospel writer, or even a pre-Christian source?

That Aramaic context might be found in the Gospels should not be particularly convincing or indicative of Jesus' historicity; Jesus was certainly not the only Aramaic-speaking person of first-century Palestine! Used together, these criteria could validate every word of the Bible, and of course, any other religion's Holy Texts. Finally, the criteria of **historical plausibility**, **contextual plausibility** and **natural probability** seem redundant given that it is the historian's core duty to determine which explanations are more plausible (and these are incorporated and superseded by the aforementioned Bayesian reasoning). They are actually very important, and the real issue is that they are not as popular as some of the other criteria. For example, if Christian scholars focussed more on the criterion of natural probability instead of the speculative criterion of embarrassment, I might not have had to write this book!

It's also strange that the criteria for authenticity generally only work in one direction, at least in the ways Bible scholars tend to use them. There are no definitive criteria for *inauthenticity* (apart from the aforementioned and relatively little-used plausibility criteria), and sayings/deeds that do not meet the criteria cannot necessarily be ruled out. Funnily enough, there are no criteria that confidently assert that Jesus could not have existed historically. In using the criteria, only one deed or saying of Jesus needs 'authenticating' in order to 'prove' Jesus' historicity, so the criteria essentially beg the question: they assume Jesus existed, meaning that they are really of no use in trying to figure out if he existed at all. However, this critique of the criteria must be tempered by the fact that the very existence of the criteria for authenticity pretty much implies that not all of the Bible is 'authentic'. If we just assumed every word of the Bible to be true, we wouldn't need the criteria. So in a way, it is incredibly ironic for Christian scholars to use the criteria to prove the existence of the Biblical Jesus (a concept very much tied to the idea of Biblical inerrancy), as this goes against the reason for their existence.

Again, the criteria of authenticity are *useless* in trying to demonstrate that Jesus existed at all. While the very point of their existence pretty much goes against the idea of the Biblical Jesus (who is the major focus of this book), the criteria still unjustifiably assumes the existence of the Historical Jesus. Robert Price criticises the criteria and how they are used by New Testament critics "who nominate as authentically dominical the sayings that are not obviously disqualified by their criteria", noting that "any or all of them still might be spurious." Price then speculates on what conclusions would be reached if scholars applied the criteria to the sources of other religious traditions, such as the *Hadith* of Muhammad.[24] With such criteria, scholars could label as 'authentic' numerous events in the lives of mythological and fictional characters, which did not actually happen in a historical sense.

That a story is embarrassing, vivid, or has been repeated many times, does not prove that the events described therein had indeed occurred. These criteria could be applied to any work of fiction or mythology, to find 'authentic' sayings and deeds. Carrier argues that by employing the criterion of embarrassment, scholars could establish the historical

existence of figures such as Attis (castrated – kind of a big deal in the ancient world, before we got all politically correct and sensitive), Inanna (stripped naked and killed), and Romulus (kin-slaying founder of Rome). The same criterion could be used to show that Jesus would be accurately described as a child murderer, as the embarrassing story of Jesus' killing of a clumsy young boy (the crime was a bump on the shoulder) depicted in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 'must' be authentic.[25] On the criteria of authenticity, and the quest for the historical Jesus, Gager concludes:

> Basically, it will not be possible to write a biography of Jesus. For this we lack all of the essential data. We know virtually nothing of his parents, siblings, early years (childhood, adolescence, early adulthood), friends, education, religious training, profession, or contacts with the broader Greco-Roman world. We know neither the date of his birth, nor the length of his public ministry (the modern consensus of two or three years is an educated guess based largely on the Gospel of John), nor his age at death (Luke 3:23 states that he was "about thirty when he began"). Thus even an optimistic view of the quest can envisage no more than a collection of "authentic" sayings and motifs devoid of context. How, then, can the historian hope to interpret this material and construct even a sketchy image of Jesus in the absence of these fundamental data? This, after all, is the goal of the quest.[26]

Perhaps the strongest indictment of the authenticity criteria (and how they are used by Biblical scholars) however, is demonstrated by the aforementioned result: an embarrassing diversity of *theories*, from both scholars and lay people, on who Jesus was, what he said, what he did, and if he even existed at all. Consensus view? What consensus view?

Faith in the sources

Biblical scholars often concern themselves with 'discovering' nuggets of truth buried underneath layers of myth and corrections. This already reveals what the experts really think about the Bible and the 'Biblical Jesus'. This is clearly at odds with the idea that every word in the Bible is true and divinely inspired. But even this assumes that the nuggets of truth are there. So this is a privileging of the texts, the assumption that these texts do give genuine historical information about a historical Jesus. Of interest to the philosopher is the relationship between the Gospels and the historicity of Jesus: they are inextricably linked. The Gospels are the chief sources of information on Jesus, while Jesus' life story forms the core of

the Gospels. So here is a clear biconditional logical connective ('if and only if'). Without Jesus, the Gospels have no story to tell. And without the Gospels, there is no (somewhat early and complete) biography of a literal Jesus' life. John Gager also noted this issue of obvious circularity:

> A more serious problem is the patent circularity of the method in dealing with the Gospels. Apart from Paul, who says precious little about Jesus, the sources for our knowledge of early Christian communities are identical with the sources for the quest itself. [27]

It follows then that if Jesus did not exist, the Gospels, if taken to be literal historical accounts, are completely unreliable. Likewise, if the Gospels are unreliable, it would be reasonable to at least entertain the possibility that Jesus did not even exist; or at least to rule out that his existence is a certainty. Given that the validity of the Gospels is heavily questioned by scholars, it would follow that it would also be reasonable to question Jesus' historical existence. If even a non-miraculous Jesus' existence is uncertain, how much more uncertain would be the ridiculous supernatural claims made about Jesus? Furthermore, using the Gospels to argue for Jesus' existence is to use circular reasoning. Arguing from external (non-Biblical) sources produces a much more convincing case.

It is a serious problem then, despite attempts to minimalise its significance, that there exists only one non-Christian attestation to Jesus within approximately one hundred years of his birth: an author who was born *after* Jesus' supposed death (Josephus, who was obviously not an eyewitness), and whose two small passages on Jesus attract the suspicion of critical scholars and historians. Critical Biblical scholars can omit as much of the Gospels (as unhistorical) as they please, but they still rely on 'insider' (biased) accounts that are inextricably interrelated to the idea of Jesus' historical existence. From a logical perspective then, it would be unreasonable not to have at least some doubt on Jesus' historicity, let alone doubts about the supernatural claims.

Professor of Religious Studies Hector Avalos takes issue with the supposed lack of critical thinking skills of Biblical scholars who simply accept what the Gospels say about Jesus, and also takes issue with scholars "privileging" the texts.[28] Avalos claims that Biblical scholarship is

primarily a religionist enterprise and also criticises the use of the Bible as a reliable source of history. When it comes to Jesus' supposed resurrection appearances for example, Avalos asserts that scholars should be careful how they use terms such as 'facts' and 'evidence'; he says that stories in the Gospels are evidence that these particular stories existed (or perhaps that certain people believed these events occurred), not that the event in question actually happened.[29]

Indeed, there is still not complete agreement over what genre the Gospels belong to, an issue that is explored later on. Whether the Gospels are examples of ancient biography, Jewish/historical fiction, midrashic-style literature, hagiography, or something else, would no doubt affect how they ought to be viewed. Richard Carrier also criticises Biblical scholars' faith in the sources used to establish 'facts' about Jesus, in his very honest and colourful assessment:

> Then I discovered that the field of New Testament studies was so monumentally fucked the task wasn't as straightforward as I had hoped. Very basic things that all scholars pretend have been resolved (producing standard answers constantly repeated as "the consensus" when really it's just everyone citing each other like robbing Peter to pay Paul), really haven't been, like when the New Testament books were written… The end result was that I realized this was going to have to be two books: one resolving the problem of method (because the biggest thing I discovered is that every expert who is a specialist in methodology has concluded, one and all, that the methods now used in Jesus studies are also totally fucked), the other applying my reformed method to the question.[30]

Carrier has revealed to me that his upcoming scholarly – and Bayesian – book on the Historical Jesus (expected in 2014) will conclude that Jesus "most probably didn't exist". Gager also criticises the methods of Biblical scholars, particularly with regards to the "quest" for the historical Jesus, alluding to the negative effects of their personal beliefs:

> Rigorous historical method has been subordinated to religious and theological concerns. With dogged regularity, the desire to reach authentic Jesus material has led questers to sacrifice methodological rigor or to minimize the difficulties posed by the sources… Working hypotheses have tended to become methodological dogmas and hence immune to critical reassessment… I will argue that previous attempts at the quest have proceeded on unexamined assumptions with respect to one or another of these issues and that prospects for a responsible quest must remain pessimistic until new foundations can be formulated and laid down.[31]

New Testament scholar James Charlesworth provides an example of scholars' uncritical faith in the sources, arguing that, "we also should assume a tradition is authentic until evidence appears that undermines its authenticity."[32] This is not how objective historians go about their business, and is clearly influenced by the Bible scholar's religious beliefs. Would Charlesworth be so understanding and charitable, when it comes to the holy texts of other religious traditions? This faith in the sources raises another issue: inconsistency.

Inconsistency and the Historical Jesus

It is interesting to consider what gives the mainstream secular Biblical scholar (as opposed to *believing* Bible scholars who are often seen as lay people with a few letters after their name, by 'real scholars') confidence in rejecting as accurate large parts of the Gospels (such as supernatural events, which are more easily dismissed), while confidently proclaiming other parts as historical fact. This was partly considered in the sub-section on the authenticity criteria, but it was concluded that many of these criteria are speculative (such as what would be found to be embarrassing, and to whom), and rely on unproven assumptions.

Avalos introduces the notion that once part of a text has been found to be fabricated, the reader cannot be sure that the text is not entirely fictional.[33] Stephen Law takes this further with his 'contamination principle', asserting that the authenticity criteria are insufficient to establish Jesus' historicity, and arguing that there are numerous supernatural claims about Jesus in the Gospels (many of which are crucial to the story, such as the virgin birth or the resurrection) which should also encourage scepticism over the more mundane claims.

Law then criticises mainstream scholars who think mythicists unreasonable, and objects to scholars "bracketing" the supernatural portions of the Gospels in order to argue for the truth of the more mundane portions, and further criticises conservative apologists who then use these "firmly established facts" to argue for the truth of the previously omitted miraculous portions.[34] I liken this to the Harry Potter series. It is

‘obvious’ that the magical battles, death-eaters and centaurs are unhistorical, but the stuff about Harry living in London with his abusive uncle and cousin is possible, so it must be true![35] But… The only way we can explain these more mundane details (such as why they are being discussed at all), is to acknowledge that the other stuff, the magical battles, the basilisks, and the existence of the dark Lord Voldemort, must be true too. Job well done; welcome to Biblical scholarship!

Law’s principles seemingly justify having at least some doubt over sources that are known to contain elements of fraud, interpolation, allegory, and fiction. i.e. The Bible. An example of inconsistency can be provided with an illustration of the afore-mentioned competing views of Jesus. Fundamentalist Christians and conservative Bible scholars alike may believe in a miracle-working, divine, Biblical, ‘Christ of Faith’, and in the inerrancy of Scripture. JMT proponents tend to cluster at the opposite end of the spectrum, proposing a ‘mythical’ (i.e. entirely fictitious) Jesus. Most secular scholars (such as Bart Ehrman) tend to lie somewhere in the middle, proposing a so-called ‘Historical Jesus’, devoid of divinity and miracles. How these more liberal scholars construct their (many and varying) ideas of who the ‘Historical Jesus’ was shall be examined more closely in the upcoming critique of historical Jesus sources, but the main – and really, the only – sources for Jesus’ life story are the Gospels.

In other words, the ‘Christ of Faith’ and the ‘Historical Jesus’ are derived from the same sources; liberal scholars do not have access to completely secular biographies of a less miraculous Jesus. It seems then that the ‘Historical Jesus’, or each scholar’s version, is a synthetic construct, a stripped-down version of the ‘Christ of Faith’; the Biblical Jesus with varying parts omitted, and with no sources of his own. Yet the Gospels do not mention this hypothesised ‘Historical Jesus’, they tell the story of the ‘Christ of Faith’, the ‘Biblical Jesus’. New Testament scholar John P. Meier inadvertently highlights flaws of the criteria and alludes to their inconsistent use, arguing that criteria such as multiple attestation and coherence could support Jesus’ miracle traditions.[36] Believers would of course see no problem here, but objective historians will find this

supremely offensive. Of course, even believers would have reason to object here, if the claims were made by rival religions…

This is in no way support of miraculous claims, appeals to the supernatural, or a theological assertion of the truth of the 'Christ of Faith'. In fact, both Ehrman (who promotes a historical Jesus), and Price (who promotes a purely mythical Jesus) give valid reasons for dismissing miracles when examining the Gospels. In a debate with Michael Licona on the resurrection of Jesus, Ehrman states that historians must try and determine the most probable explanations, while miracles by definition are the most improbable explanations. They are considered to be miracles because they overturn scientific laws.[37] Price refers to the principle of analogy; if the Gospels mention events such as miracles that do not fit into what scientists and scholars know of the world today (the laws of physics for example), and it happens to be more analogous to what is known of myth, then these stories must be rejected as literal and true accounts.[38]

Influential American rationalist and revolutionary, Thomas Paine, lent his support to this approach, stating that it is far more likely that a person simply lied than that "nature should go out of her course".[39] I'll give you an easy example. Is it more likely that the intergalactic emperor Xenu (of Scientology fame) really did kill all those beings that would become the thetans that cause us all to have negative emotions, or is it more likely that L. Ron Hubbard (the founder of Scientology, and a former science fiction writer – go figure) simply made all that up? Now if a secular scholar is willing to dismiss (justifiably) the more miraculous parts of the Gospels in order to construct their version of the 'Historical Jesus', consistency with this sort of scepticism could lead to the rejection of more and more of the story until potentially nothing is left as genuine. Basically, most of what the Bible claims can be dismissed instantly, such as claims of Jesus' divinity and resurrection. But even the more mundane claims can be viewed upon with suspicion.

If it is certain that a miraculous event mentioned in the Gospels could not have happened, it does not necessitate that another event did occur, merely because it was in accordance with the laws of physics. Perhaps when examining the Gospels then, secular scholars have no justification to

confidently dismiss as mythical more supernatural characters such as Satan and Gabriel the angel, while assuming more mundane characters such as Nicodemus (found only in the Gospel of John) to be historical. It would be far more probable that Nicodemus existed (relatively, compared to Gabriel), but this should not be confused with absolute probability or certainty. We can only speculate why (most of) the more liberal scholars do not allow for the possibility that all of the Gospels could potentially be dismissed as reliable. This may have to do with personal motives, ego and job security. In any case, scholars should not interpret the possible as probable, nor the probable as certain.

Bart Ehrman is usually a bit of a hero to 'atheists', as he exposes the many problems with the Bible. Yet he is as dogmatic as the believer, when it comes to the less significant 'Historical Jesus'. Ehrman highlights the inconsistency mentioned above when he discredits the Gospels as reliable sources of evidence for Jesus' alleged resurrection.[40] He says that the best evidence would be numerous, independent, contemporary, coherent, fairly disinterested eyewitness accounts.[41] He then describes the Gospels as few, relying upon each other, written decades after the alleged events, problematic, contradictory, biased, and written by anonymous authors who were not eyewitnesses.[42]

He says that the Gospels are not the kind of sources historians would want in establishing what probably happened in the past, and he is right to say so. He is all too happy to discredit the Gospels when it comes to opposing the *resurrection* of Jesus, yet somehow (and inconsistently) when it comes to the *existence* of Jesus, he concludes that the gospels "make a convincing case".[43] Suddenly, these terrible sources are quite good! He completely trashes the Gospels as unreliable, yet feels that at least on Jesus' existence, he has access to some absolute truth. It seems that such scholars are quite happy to admit that we can know, with certainty, virtually nothing about Jesus, except that he *definitely* existed… Surely there is room to question that too.

Ehrman is even able to turn these few Gospels into numerous independent sources, by making reference to oral tradition, hypothetical sources such as *Q*, *M* and *L*, and the 'second degree' hypothetical (and

supposedly multiple) sources behind these hypothetical sources,[44] which is hardly an acceptable historical method of dealing with the issue of a lack of primary sources. These sources don't exist. It is also unclear if his conclusions logically follow from the premises, with Ehrman downplaying the importance and reliability of non-Christian extra-Biblical sources (such as Tacitus), yet concluding that "Tacitus is most useful of all, for his reference shows that high-ranking Roman officials of the early second century knew that Jesus had lived".[45] Just a few lines before this show of certainty, Ehrman conceded that "It should be clear in any event that Tacitus is basing his comment on hearsay rather than, say, detailed historical research." Ehrman is clearly confused. Christian believers or not, these Bible scholars don't always come off as logical and level-headed. As mentioned earlier, famous Bible scholar John Dominic Crossan noted the lack of agreement among Biblical scholars, and also criticised their methods:

> But that stunning diversity is an academic embarrassment. It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography.[46]

A clear example of this is when conservative Biblical scholar John Dickson refers to 'facts' such as the "empty tomb" and "numerous eyewitnesses" to make the shocking and unjustified claim that historians agree, "that there is a resurrection-shaped dent in the historical record."[47] They don't. As for the diversity, it is unfortunate that the scholars lack agreement and come up with wildly different conclusions given that they have access to the same sources; surely an indication of the inadequacy and inconsistency of their methods. Those that sit on both ends of the 'Jesus spectrum' may well wonder how the middle-ground liberal scholars can be so certain about some parts of the Gospels, while totally dismissive of others.

Conservative Christians and sceptical JMT proponents alike might wonder how a secular Biblical scholar who accepts a historical Jesus can be so certain that JMT proponents alone are 'fringe', while so casually (and certainly) dismissing large parts of the sources that mythicists might dismiss in whole. If the unreliability of the Gospels (or at least the justifiable doubts about them) allows secular scholars to reasonably

question Jesus' resurrection, then there is also some justification to question the more natural elements such as Jesus' death, and his birth.

Before we finally move on to the sources, it is important to note that when it comes to the existence of Jesus, both atheistic sceptics and Christian believers may have valid reasons for accepting a historical Jesus, or denying one. It would seem obvious that a Christian believer would want to see that the figure they revere or dedicate their life to, is verified by history. On the other hand, the believer may place greater importance on faith than on evidence. The believer may also prefer there be no evidence for a "Historical Jesus", as it could contradict the "Christ of Faith" portrayed in the Bible and/or their particular theologies.

Likewise, the atheist may be quite content for there to be no historical Jesus, but could also have good reason for desiring evidence of a "Historical Jesus" that greatly contradicts the "Christ of Faith", as hinted at above. A secular biography, devoid of supernatural claims, that portrays Jesus as a violent, vulgar, prostitute-visiting alcoholic, who occasionally repeated some teachings he learnt in the Far East, would probably be championed by vocal anti-Christians. In that case, a purely "Mythical Jesus" would actually greatly benefit Christendom, as there would be no risk of the discovery of "the real Jesus" that could potentially destroy or discredit the faith. It may be cynical to think so, but a non-existing Jesus would certainly serve the Church well.

It is also important to note that it is not only the conservative Christian that may find belief in Jesus comforting. Many secular humanists, Hindus, Muslims and atheists could also happily accept a natural Jesus, or at least one whose nature is seen to be far exaggerated in the Gospels. Indeed, such people may wonder why they should deny the existence of a compassionate man who tried to promote some worthwhile ideas, just because others would later ascribe all manner of myths to his life story. I, for one, would think, "The more such people, the merrier". There are many questionable passages in the Bible, but generally the hypothesised 'historical Jesus' seems like a really likeable person. Robert M. Price offers his view on why many atheists might accept a historical Jesus, and why they might viciously criticise their more sceptical brethren:

> Automatically finding the Christ Myth theory kooky or outrageous is, I think, a trace of satisfaction with the lingering conventionalism against which we fight so hard as Atheists when the question under debate is not Jesus but God.[48]

Now that we have exposed the terrible methods used by many Bible scholars and questioned their motives, it is time to examine the sources that are used to establish the ‘facts’ about Jesus.

Chapter 2: Problems posed by the sources

In this chapter, numerous issues which raise doubt as to the details of Jesus' life shall be discussed, such as the argument from silence, and the inadequacy of the existing sources (referring to Jesus' extremely poor historical record). We will also consider the genre of the Gospels, which often seem anything but objective and accurate historical biographies.

The Argument from Silence

One of the most curious problems the historian faces when researching Jesus is not posed by the sources, but by the *lack* of sources. There are no extra-Biblical references to Jesus that are contemporary and by eyewitnesses. Absolutely none. Even when including the Biblical books, there are no primary sources whatsoever, for the life of Jesus. The books of the Bible were penned decades after Jesus' death, and do not provide us with direct eyewitness accounts. Remember, the Gospels are anonymous. This argument is generally accepted by Biblical scholars. Bart Ehrman for example, acknowledged the relative historical silence on Jesus:

> What sorts of things do pagan authors from the time of Jesus have to say about him? Nothing. As odd as it may seem, there is no mention of Jesus at all by any of his pagan contemporaries. There are no birth records, no trial transcripts, no death certificates; there are no expressions of interest, no heated slanders, no passing references – nothing. In fact, if we broaden our field of concern to the years after his death – even if we include the entire first century of the Common Era – there is not so much as a solitary reference to Jesus in any non-Christian, non-Jewish source of any kind. I should stress that we do have a large number of documents from the time – the writings of poets, philosophers, historians, scientists, and government officials, for example, not to mention the large collection of surviving inscriptions on stone and private letters and legal documents on papyrus. In none of this vast array of surviving writings is Jesus' name ever so much as mentioned.[49]

Strangely, Ehrman would later claim the following:

> With respect to Jesus, we have numerous, independent accounts of his life in the sources lying behind the Gospels (and the writings of Paul) – sources that originated in Jesus' native tongue Aramaic and that can be dated to within just a year or two of his life

> (before the religion moved to convert pagans in droves). Historical sources like that are is pretty astounding for an ancient figure of any kind.[50]

This claim refers to the hypothetical sources he assumes existed, as explained in *Did Jesus Exist?*, and is thus entirely unconvincing.[51] Furthermore, even these non-existing sources are not contemporary, but from soon after Jesus' death. These non-existing sources should be as unconvincing to us as the non-existing sources that prove that Zeus existed and that he did many great things. Modern scholars and historians do not have access to these *hypothetical* sources behind the Gospels (or the writings of Paul); nor have these non-existing sources been accurately dated. They obviously can't be dated. No competent historian would find Ehrman's numerous non-existent sources "astounding". We can all speculate as to why respected Bible scholars such as Ehrman would feel the need to fabricate evidence, if Jesus' life details could not reasonably be questioned, based on the evidence that is available. In other words, if the case for Jesus was so air-tight, there would be no need to rely on these imaginary sources.

The discussion of the historical Jesus is generally limited to historical documents, written by persons other than Jesus, long after his life's events, as that is all that is available. Certainty cannot be provided by hypothetical documents, and there are no available artefacts (such as his tombstone, a sculpture of him, or a piece of furniture he made), or works written by Jesus himself.[52] The sources for Jesus are all, at best, secondary sources. The earliest extra-Biblical or non-Biblical references (such as passages among the works of Josephus and Tacitus) appear decades after the supposed events. The New Testament Biblical books all appear several decades to a century after the alleged events of Jesus' life.[53] None of these sources are contemporary, nor can they be assumed to be penned by eyewitnesses.

That any of the sources could have been written by eyewitnesses is very unlikely. Since Josephus and Tacitus were both born after Jesus' supposed death (around 30CE), Paul never claims to be an eyewitness (even asserting that his sources are purely supernatural),[54] the canonical Gospels are written by anonymous authors, and that the Gospel writers do

not claim to be eyewitnesses, there is no reason to assume that we have access to any eyewitness accounts. Some believers claim that the Gospel writers made use of eyewitness accounts (of which there is no proof), clearly forgetting that this still means that the Gospels themselves are not eyewitness accounts, and are secondary sources, at best.

Avalos also points out that the Greco-Roman sources used as 'independent confirmation' of Jesus' historicity all depend on manuscripts dating from the mediaeval era, allowing plenty of opportunity for creative editing.[55] And the same goes for the books of the Bible – the copies we have access to are far removed in time from the dates the originals were supposedly written. There is a total lack of primary sources when it comes to Jesus. This is generally not opposed by critical scholars. What is up for debate is how significant this is. Arguments such as "there is more evidence for Jesus than for any other figure in history" are completely fallacious (Julius Caesar, for example, is attested by numerous primary sources), and irrelevant (Socrates' historical record is also not so good, but billions of people don't proclaim his divinity). The only concern is with the available sources for Jesus, and how reliable they are.

Any argument that primary sources are not important with regards to Jesus studies must also be rejected as completely fallacious. It is a defence that would only reasonably be put forward by a Christian apologist, who has identified the issue of a complete lack of primary sources, and is obviously disturbed by it. As we saw earlier, according to top historians, primary sources are of the *utmost importance*. Common sense would also hopefully allow that contemporary documents, written by reasonably disinterested eyewitnesses would generally be more trustworthy than biased, non-eyewitness accounts written decades after the fact. And if primary sources are so vitally important for any old historical question, surely they take on even greater importance when we are asking historical questions about the Son of God who died for our sins and requires that we worship the one true God!

Now when it comes to historical Jesus studies, the various questions intended to be asked of the primary sources can only be applied to the available secondary sources. And the questions intended to be asked of

secondary sources cannot reasonably be asked at all; given that they demand comparison to the primary sources, which no longer exist, and possibly never existed. Given these difficulties, it stands to reason that the lack of primary sources (as direct evidence, and as a reference for the secondary sources) ensures that whatever is said about Jesus, is not said with certainty. From a critical perspective, this alone justifies having doubts as to Jesus' alleged life story, and even whether he had a life at all.

One theory that could diminish the significance of this problem is the theorised existence of a reliable oral tradition that originates during and soon after the lifetime of Jesus, eventually emerging in the Gospels. Such oral traditions are also hypothetical, cannot be critically examined, and thus cannot be taken seriously as primary source evidence. Gager dismisses scholars' unjustified belief in the reliability of oral tradition:

> Thus, the fact that we are limited to written texts means that we can never reconstruct changes which occurred during oral transmission… we must conclude that all previous attempts at the quest have proceeded on ill-founded and misleading assumptions about the oral tradition.[56]

While Biblical scholars do not have access to eyewitness accounts, Gager notes that even if they did, the unreliability of oral transmission makes doubt a prerequisite. He also argues that scholars have "not proven that early Christianity offered the institutional or social conditions that would have promoted careful memorization and controlled transmission of oral material. And without strong evidence to the contrary, any theory of a fixed oral tradition will remain highly dubious."[57] Ehrman has also criticised scholarly reliance on oral tradition, noting that, "Stories are moulded to the time and circumstance in which they are told."[58]

Another popular defence against the argument of silence may be that modern historians cannot reasonably expect primary sources. Various scholars reject this claim, asserting that if Jesus was a historically significant figure, someone would have written about him, in a time when there were ample historians and authors (such as Philo of Alexandria), and especially considering the Biblical claims of Jesus' fame, controversies, miracles and other great achievements. Whether historians should expect direct evidence is not even the most relevant point. The fact is, no

evidence, is no evidence. There can be innumerable explanations as to why there are no primary sources for Jesus; and some of them may be valid. But that does not solve the problem. There is still a total lack of primary sources, and scholars must accept that that places limitations on what can be known about Jesus with certainty. Hector Avalos agrees, and goes so far as to describe any further progress in the 'quest for the historical Jesus' as "futile because we simply do not have *any* preserved accounts of Jesus from his own time or from any proven eyewitnesses."[59]

Jesus mythicists could move the argument from silence into a more assertive direction by pointing to overall silences and suspicious gaps in the records of early authors writing about events occurring during Jesus' lifetime. Philo of Alexandria for example, makes no mention of Jesus or his followers; nor does Seneca the Younger, a contemporary of Jesus, who discusses crucifixion at some length, yet neglects to refer to one which would become history's most famous example, and would supposedly result in the miraculous resurrection of Jesus (*Moral Letters*, 101).[60] Staying with Seneca, let's look at the sorts of topics that he does consider historically significant, to the generations of people to come (*Moral Letters*, 70):

> Nay, men of the meanest lot in life have by a mighty impulse escaped to safety, and when they were not allowed to die at their own convenience, or to suit themselves in their choice of the instruments of death, they have snatched up whatever was lying ready to hand, and by sheer strength have turned objects which were by nature harmless into weapons of their own. For example, there was lately in a training-school for wild-beast gladiators a German, who was making ready for the morning exhibition; he withdrew in order to relieve himself, – the only thing which he was allowed to do in secret and without the presence of a guard. While so engaged, he seized the stick of wood, tipped with a sponge, which was devoted to the vilest uses, and stuffed it, just as it was, down his throat; thus he blocked up his windpipe, and choked the breath from his body.

Seneca obviously considers bizarre and disgusting ways to die, more significant than the Son of God, or to the more liberal scholars, the person whose teachings would lead to the creation of one of the world's largest religious traditions. There's actually quite a lot of benign historical information about which public servants did what tasks, how certain people brushed their teeth with urine, the sorts of animals people ate during lean times, and most importantly, how people took a shit, how they disposed of said shit, and who they shat with. And yet, not a single

contemporary of Jesus, including the supposedly many that were touched by his teachings and/or witnessed his miracles, thought it necessary to write anything down. We are meant to believe that they just couldn't be bothered. It was apparently vital to ancient historians, that they document all sorts of rectal issues; the Son of God however, not so much.

Considering what sort of evidence we do have for other, far less significant, issues and persons, it is absolutely inexcusable that the King of Kings, who wrought many miracles, died for our sins, and according to the Bible, was known throughout the land, fails to produce even one single primary source. Noteworthy silences are explored further in the next section (paying particular attention to Tacitus). The argument from silence single-handedly does considerable damage to claims made about Jesus. Now that we have discovered how much we don't have when it comes to Jesus, let us examine what we do have.

Common issues with the Jesus sources

It is now time to examine the sources that we do have access to. The available sources are unreliable and should not be trusted as sources of objective historical information. New Testament scholars such as Helmut Koester acknowledge that the surviving evidence is very problematic.[61] There are sceptical objections about every one of the sources, many of which shall be discussed below. But first, we shall briefly discuss a few of the limitations that all of these sources share. As mentioned earlier, with no primary sources to compare with, historians cannot fully determine the reliability of these secondary sources. In addition, there is no access to the originals of these documents, and thus it cannot be ruled out that important changes were made, nor can composition dates be stated with absolute certainty.[62] We could stop there, but this would be a very short book and you might feel a bit cheated!

Now the focus will be on sources from within one hundred years of Jesus' death (Jesus supposedly having been born around 4BCE, dying around 30CE); an approach used by many Biblical scholars, such as Bart Ehrman. He argues that writings after that time "almost certainly cannot be considered independent and reliable witnesses", though he acknowledges that that could also be the case with the sources from within one hundred years too.

The primary sources

This is easy; there are none. I know I have mentioned this a few times now, but this is crucial, and we clearly should not forget it. Primary sources are contemporary, eyewitness sources of evidence. Primary sources could be artefacts (there are no confirmed physical pieces of evidence for a Historical Jesus, let alone the Biblical Jesus) or documents from the hand of the person in question, or from an eyewitness, and which is contemporary to the event in question. There are no primary sources when it comes to Jesus. All the evidence used to establish Jesus' existence is at best from secondary sources, which will become evident as the sources are individually examined. These pieces of evidence are documents, from non-eyewitnesses, written long after the events of Jesus' life, and which only exist in copies dating even further from Jesus' life. We simply do not have access to any primary sources when it comes to Jesus of Nazareth; this fact alone serves to eliminate any certainty about Jesus, whether we are considering the supernatural aspects, or even the more mundane aspects such as his historical existence.

The Pauline Epistles (incl. Hebrews)

The Apostle Paul provides the earliest surviving Christian writings, with 1Thessalonians usually dated to 49 CE, and his later works appearing around the early 60's CE. While they are the earliest sources (this will be crucial in the next chapter), the Pauline epistles are not primary sources in regards to Jesus' historicity. They are not contemporaneous with Jesus' life and Paul, by his own admission, cannot be considered an eyewitness to

the historical Jesus. The following verses from the Pauline epistles reveal how Paul knows the information he shares:

> 11 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.[63]

> 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures…[64]

Not only does Paul never mention his possible reliable, first-hand accounts, his only named sources are the Old Testament Scriptures (which were written long before Jesus' birth), and his 'direct channel to the divine'. Hardly what a competent and objective historian would deem even remotely suitable, let alone convincing! Paul does not know of the few events of Jesus' life he mentions as a result of having witnessed them. It could even be concluded that he did not come to know of these events by learning from those who were closest to Jesus (such as his apostles or relatives), as Paul clearly mentions his sources, and specifically dismisses human sources. That Paul, supposedly being converted and writing so soon after Jesus' death, gets all his information about Jesus from the Old Testament and his direct link to his god (rather than from human eyewitnesses) is quite damning, especially as his epistles are the earliest sources we have on Jesus.

Paul also has very little to say about Jesus' time on Earth. For example, he fails to explain when and where the crucifixion happened. The Gospels, which were written after Paul wrote the Epistles, do the work of filling in the blanks, attempting to explain Jesus' life story. Paul seems completely disinterested in a recent, historical Jesus, as if such a concept would be secondary to Paul's primary message. Imagine that, a Christianity in which a historical Jesus is not really important. Some passages from these epistles (such as in Hebrews, which is actually anonymous) could actually imply that Jesus has not been on Earth in recent history:

> 4 If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.[65]

> 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [66]

The implication with the first passage being that Jesus had not actually been on Earth, and the implication in the second passage being that he was only named Jesus *after* his death (implying a very different view of Jesus, such as a heavenly, celestial or 'non-literal' Jesus), in direct contradiction to the Gospel story. Interestingly, the Pauline Epistles are generally dated substantially earlier than the Gospels, which leaves open the possibility that the Pauline Epistles actually provide the more accurate picture of Jesus. This will become important in the next chapter, as the possibility that the Jesus of the Pauline Epistles is not the same as the Jesus of the Gospels (specifically that early Christians such as Paul did not believe in a literal, fleshly or earthly Jesus) is considered. Given that Paul's knowledge of Jesus comes from the Old Testament and his direct channel to the divine rather than first-hand eyewitness accounts, he can certainly be written off as a reliable and primary source of evidence for Jesus' historicity. New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann (University of Göttingen) agrees:

> In short, Paul cannot be considered a reliable witness to either the teachings, the life, or the historical existence of Jesus.[67]

Paul may have met people who were very close to Jesus, such as James and Peter, but *never* claims them as sources. And the significance of Paul having met such figures needs to reconsidered, as the stories of these figures' associations with Jesus are mentioned in the Gospels, which are *later* documents. Given that Paul also never claims to have received this information from anyone who may have witnessed the events of Jesus' life (potentially eliminating the possibility of primary sources, which don't currently exist anyway), his status even as a reliable secondary source leaves plenty of room for doubt.

Either Paul indeed is speaking straight from the Old Testament and from ‘supernatural sources’ as he claims (leaving open the possibility of a non-literal Jesus, and non-literal accounts), or he does have other sources, and is simply lying. The naughty boy. Either way, the credibility of his work in regards to providing accurate information on Jesus is very much compromised. Historians have no good reason to trust a man who claims to get all his information from ‘God’ or who is lying. This is discussed further in the next chapter, where the possibility of a non-literal or purely mythical Jesus shall be examined more closely.

The Canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts and John

Like the Pauline epistles, the four Canonical Gospels cannot be considered to be primary sources. Younger than the earliest Pauline writings, the gospels are written around forty or more years after the supposed death of Jesus,[68] which could also eliminate the possibility of them being written by eyewitnesses, long after the fact (considering life expectancies in the first century). The Gospel authors are anonymous, so it cannot simply be presumed that they are eyewitnesses.[69] The only Gospel which even gives a clue as to who may have written it is the gospel of John (“the disciple whom Jesus loved”),[70] which still does not provide a name, or a list of the author’s credentials or previous works, and is the latest of the four canonical Gospels. The importance of knowing the author in regards to determining reliability and potential bias (and perhaps the genre of the work, which is discussed later in this chapter) need not be seriously questioned. It is obvious that the author’s identity is of the utmost importance.

We cannot determine the reliability of these secondary sources by comparing them with the primary sources, as there are no primary sources to compare them with. The Gospel writers do not even claim to be using trustworthy primary sources, nor do they name them. Nor do they show any scepticism with these hypothetical sources or demonstrate any sort of critical methodology. Even if they did, we do not have access to primary sources, and thus have no way to determine with certainty, if the Gospels are truly reliable. As mentioned earlier, New Testament scholar Bart

Ehrman describes the Gospels as: few, relying upon each other, written decades after the alleged events, problematic, contradictory, biased, and written by anonymous authors who were not eyewitnesses. The Gospels are not the kind of sources historians would want in establishing what probably happened in the past.

In his book, *Lost Christianities*, Ehrman mentions that the gospels lack first-person narrative, and lack any claim of being companions of eyewitnesses. He goes on to say that most scholars have abandoned the Church-given identifiers of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, noting that the Gospels are anonymous works. When it comes to the third-person narratives, readers could be forgiven for thinking that the Gospel writers seem more like all-knowing narrators (like an author of fiction), even when they speak of events in Jesus' life when he was *alone*, such as the temptation in the wilderness or the prayer at Gethsemane.[71] This could be a crucial issue; if the Gospels are not meant to be taken literally, sifting through them with *criteria* to determine what could be authentic and historical may well be pointless, and scholars (and also believers) might inadvertently ignore the true meaning and purpose of the Gospels in the process.

With regards to hypothetical sources such as *Q* (and the other possible 'numerous' oral and written sources behind the gospels), which may be esteemed by scholars such as Ehrman, it is important to realise that they are hypothetical, and historians do not have access to them. Some of these sources may be fairly well-respected in academia (such as *Q*, which is by no means accepted by all scholars, and is in any case primarily a *sayings* document), but their contents cannot be verified. As explained, this book shall not seriously consider hypothetical sources to which we lack access. With regards to the miraculous and supernatural claims found in the Gospels, such as the virgin birth, and Jesus' walking on water; Biblical scholars of all types find them to be problematic. Ehrman understands that history can only deal with what is most likely (while miracles are by their very nature, unlikely),[72] while Robert M. Price and many other scholars makes use of the principle of analogy. Price describes this as a historical method whereby claims that are not analogous to what scientists and

scholars currently know of the world (such as the laws of physics) can be dismissed by the historian.[73]

While the Gospels are anonymous, meaning historians cannot be sure of the authors' reliability or motives, their supernatural claims makes it easy for critical scholars to see them as being far from secular and sober authors of history, whilst having no intention to evangelize. If these supernatural claims are indeed false, and historians remain critical and consistent, it is reasonable to avoid accepting these texts "as gospel",[74] especially when there are no extant primary sources to determine the accuracy and validity of these works. Many scholars (including historicists) have commented on mythic parallels between Jesus' story as told in the Gospels, and the stories of earlier gods and mythical heroes. While not necessarily eliminating a historical core behind the Jesus story, it would be of interest to determine just how much of the Gospel story could be borrowed from earlier and contemporary works, when we are focussing on the Biblical Jesus or Christ of Faith. The more that can be dismissed from the Gospel story as being inauthentic, the more reason there is to question whether that which remains must be a true and accurate account of actual historical events.

We earlier discussed the inadequacy of the various criteria for authenticity or how they are used, such as the criterion of independent attestation. Mark is considered be the earliest of the four Gospels, with Matthew and Luke borrowing heavily from it. John appears later and could thus be borrowing from all of the Synoptic Gospels. Given this information, and the fact that the Gospels are anonymous, it would be over-reaching to claim that a particular saying or action of Jesus is authentic because of 'multiple independent attestation'. Carrier even raises the possibility (and perhaps the need to be cautious) that all sources dated after the gospel of Mark could have been tainted by it, and that this simply cannot be ruled out.[75] Judging the Gospels by the historical methods discussed earlier, it is clear that there are question marks over their reliability, as admitted by David Noel Freedman:

> When it comes to the historical question about the Gospels, I adopt a mediating position – that is, these are religious records, close to the sources, but they are not in accordance with modern historiographic requirements or professional standards.[76]

Ehrman also points out the biases and contradictions of the Gospel authors:

> It is also true that our best sources about Jesus, the early Gospels, are riddled with problems. These were written decades after Jesus' life by biased authors who are at odds with one another on details up and down the line.[77]

Gager also criticises the Gospels as unreliable sources for the historical Jesus:

> The Gospels are the final products of a long and creative tradition, and the earliest Gospel (for most Mark, for some Matthew) is customarily dated about forty years after the death of Jesus. During these years not only was old material reworked, expanded, collated, and reinterpreted, but new material was regularly interpolated. Eschatological pronouncements of Christian prophets, ex post facto predictions, Old Testament proof texts, and ethical maxims were attributed to Jesus and thereby "authorized" for believers. [78]

To briefly summarise on what we lack with regards to the evidence of Jesus' life: the Gospels make mention of Jesus' humble birth, his teaching of elders, his teaching of multitudes, his healing of the sick, his casting out of demons, his raising of Lazarus from the dead, his being raised from the dead by God, his glorious entry into Jerusalem, his clashes with the Roman and Jewish authorities, his death, his triumphant return, and many other wonderful and much-cherished stories. Of all this, and other details of Jesus' life, miraculous or mundane, there is not a single secular, contemporary, eyewitness account. Perhaps this is why Robert Funk, noted Biblical scholar and co-founder of the *Jesus Seminar*, said the following:

> As an historian, I do not know for certain that Jesus really existed, that he is anything more than the figment of some overactive imaginations… In my view, there is nothing about Jesus of Nazareth that we can know beyond any possible doubt. In the mortal life we have there are only probabilities. And the Jesus that scholars have isolated in the ancient gospels, gospels that are bloated with the will to believe, may turn out to be only another image that merely reflects our deepest longings.[79]

The issues with the Gospels allow for enough doubt to consider the already implausible supernatural claims about Jesus as completely without historical 'proof'. And while issues with the Gospels are certainly not

enough to rule out the possibility that there was some sort of (virtually insignificant) historical Jesus behind the Gospel story, it also cannot be said with absolute certainty that there must have been one. The lack of primary sources and the problems with the Gospel stories alone, justifies being doubtful. And this is damning to believers who happen to be evidentialists, to whom 'the evidence' is important. If we can't even know that there existed some sort of Jesus, we definitely can't be sure that there was a Jesus who was divine and who was raised from the dead.

The remainder of the New Testament

Compared to the earlier works by Paul who provides the earliest sources of information about Jesus, and the Gospels (which offer the most complete accounts of his life), the remainder of the New Testament (namely the apocalyptic book of Revelation and the general epistles) offer very little in the way of useful information on the historical Jesus.[80] It is likely that in general, later religious writings (both Biblical and extra-Biblical) are simply be borrowing from and embellishing on the information in the Gospels and the writings of Paul.

As with the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, there are no existing primary sources with which to validate the few claims made by the remainder of the New Testament. One example of the lack of information on the historical Jesus among the general epistles is provided by the epistle of James (often considered to be the 'brother of Jesus', though he never claims to be). James fails to provide details of the historical Jesus, including his death; he also seems uninterested in Jesus' alleged resurrection. Religious Studies scholar Matt Jackson-McCabe recognises this and alludes to James placing far greater importance on the *parousia* (presence or arrival) of the 'heavenly Christ':

> In James, "Jesus saves" not through his death and resurrection, but only to the extent that his heavenly *parousia* will signal the destruction of the wicked oppressors of God's elect and the establishment of the long-promised era of blessedness for the righteous… The Letter of James evidences a variant early Christian myth that, while different from the death-and-resurrection-centered one that is reflected in much of the extant Christian literature, is consistent in significant respects with other Jewish messianic thinking in the early Roman period.[81]

Not only does James' portrayal of Jesus in one of the earliest Christian writings leave open the possibility that 'his' Jesus is a heavenly or 'celestial figure' (discussed in more detail later), he also provides insight into the fragmentary nature of early Christianity. These 'Jamesian Christians' seem less interested in Christ's ultimate redemptive act for all of mankind, and more interested in national restoration, "the reestablishment of a twelve-tribe kingdom" (a united Israel) by a vengeful, heavenly being.[82]

Extra-Biblical sources

The following extra-Biblical (and generally non-Christian) sources share a number of characteristics that raises doubt as to their reliability as evidence for Jesus' life story. All these sources are secondary sources. They are written decades to centuries after the events of Jesus' life, by non-eyewitnesses. Many of these authors were born after Jesus' death. Furthermore, there are no existing primary sources to compare them to and to validate them, so we cannot be certain about their reliability. Some of these sources were susceptible to pious fraud (believers tampered with the texts). We also do not have access to the originals, so cannot be absolutely certain about which parts are authentic (if any) and which are forged (if any). Even if genuine, these sources probably just repeat what is already 'known' from the Gospels, or could simply repeat what a Christian contemporary believed. That Christians would spread stories of Jesus in the late first century, second century and beyond, would not be particularly surprising!

Ehrman goes as far as to say that these sources are relatively unimportant in the debate on Jesus' historicity, admitting that they contain nothing that cannot be taken from the earlier sources (generally the Gospels).[83] William Lane Craig, a popular Christian apologist who is more interested in the Biblical Jesus as opposed to Ehrman's Historical Jesus, shares a similar attitude, understanding that the New Testament is where our focus should lie. If these non-Biblical sources are unimportant, and I agree that they generally are, then all the 'evidence' for Jesus

essentially comes from the Bible, an obviously religious collection of books that contain much mythical and ahistorical or non-historical material. Nevertheless, this brief overview of the extra-Biblical sources should further establish that it is very reasonable to be doubtful about all aspects of Jesus' life story, including his very existence. Many scholars point out numerous issues with regards to these sources' reliability, which shall be surveyed below.

Josephus

Among the works of the Jewish-Roman historian Josephus, scholars find two highly disputed passages often used as evidence for Jesus. First, from Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (*Antiquities* 18.3.3), is the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum*:

> Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

This is such a powerful passage that would seemingly confirm Jesus' existence and also his status as the Messiah, that it sounds almost too good to be true. It is. Most scholars express reservations with this passage. With references to Jesus such as "if it be lawful to call him a man" (alluding to his divinity) and "He was Christ", it would seem that Josephus not only confirms Jesus' historical existence, but was a Christian believer also. Any doubt is dispelled with his allusion to the resurrection. One obvious problem is that Josephus was not a Christian! He was a Pharisaic Jew, the same people Jesus called "children of the devil".[84]

It would seem highly unlikely that a historian, let alone a Jewish historian, would hint that Jesus was divine, that he was resurrected, and would call him "Christ". Scholars see this passage as fraudulent, in whole, [85] or in part.[86] One reason is that early Christian theologian Origen,

writing after Josephus, claimed that Josephus did not believe Jesus was the Christ.[87] Historians might also expect Origen to make use of this Josephus quotation, if it existed during his lifetime – it probably did not. Other early Christian apologists, such as Justin Martyr, also fail to quote this passage. Highly respected Josephan scholar, Louis Feldman, discusses the historical silence surrounding the *Testimonium Flavianum*:

> We may remark here on the passage in Josephus which has occasioned by far more comment than any other, the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum* (*Ant.* XVIII.63-4) concerning Jesus. The passage appears in all our manuscripts; but a considerable number of Christian writers – Pseudo-Justin and Theophilus in the second century, Minucius Felix, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen in the third century, and Methodius and Pseudo-Eustathius in the early fourth century – who knew Josephus and cited from his works do not refer to this passage, though one would imagine that it would be the first passage that a Christian apologist would cite. In particular, Origen (*Contra Celsum* 1.47 and *Commentary on Matthew* 10.17), who certainly knew Book 18 of the *Antiquities* and cites five passages from it, explicitly states that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as Christ. The first to cite the *Testimonium* is Eusebius (c. 324); and even after him, we may note, there are eleven Christian writers who cite Josephus but not the *Testimonium*. In fact, it is not until Jerome in the early fifth century that we have another reference to it.[88]

If this passage contains Christian forgeries to some extent, it might not be surprising if the whole passage was fraudulent. The precedent has already been set that the text was tampered with. Ehrman admits that the removal of the entire passage makes the surrounding text flow more smoothly and that the first person to quote it is Eusebius (a fourth-century Christian bishop).[89] This could be significant as Eusebius is well known as a defender of pious fraud (justifying lying for the Church)[90] and by his own words (*Church History* 8.2.3) exposes himself as a shoddy historian: “Hence we shall not mention those who were shaken by the persecution… But we shall introduce into this history in general only those events which may be useful first to ourselves and afterwards to posterity.”[91]

Given that Eusebius is the first to make mention of the Testimonium Flavianum, it is no wonder why some scholars would not only suspect that the passage is entirely fraudulent, but that it was Eusebius himself who fabricated it.[92] A form of the Testimonium Flavianum is also found in a version of Josephus’ *Wars of the Jews*, the so-called *Slavonic Josephus*;

though this version is largely considered to be a mediaeval invention, filled with Christian forgeries, having "no value either for the study of Josephus or the beginnings of Christianity."[93] The second passage from the works of Josephus that mentions Jesus, also from *Antiquities of the Jews*:

> Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned… Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.

Apart from the phrase "called Christ", this passage does not seem to offer any support for Jesus' historical existence. The Jesus mentioned need not necessarily be Jesus of Nazareth. After all Jesus (or Joshua) and James (or Jacob) are very common Jewish names; and there are quite a few people named Jesus mentioned in the works of Josephus. In fact, soon after the "called Christ" reference, Josephus makes mention of "Jesus, the son of Damneus", a former high priest. It may well be that this is the Jesus referenced earlier, as some scholars believe, and this would explain why James' brother is mentioned; the high priest being a noteworthy figure. Hoffmann is one mainstream Biblical scholar who also believed "called Christ" is a Christian interpolation (addition) and that this passage merely discusses Jesus bar Damneus.[94]

The worth of this passage hinges on the authenticity of the phrase "called Christ". If this is a Christian forgery (possibly in whole, as suggested by Earl Doherty who notes that Ananus is spoken of critically here, yet Josephus seems to think highly of him in his *The Jewish War*), [95] this passage offers nothing on Jesus' historicity, or more importantly, on the supernatural claims about Jesus. It may also be possible that this James merely called himself the brother of Jesus Christ (who may have been a 'heavenly figure' as we saw in the Epistle of James), much as Josephus' reference to Emperor Caligula calling himself, "brother of Jupiter".[96] Somebody claiming to be the brother of a god or similar being, is of course not proof that that god or being exists.

Given that this book does show signs of tampering (that is, in the *Testimonium Flavianum*), it would not seem all that unlikely, or difficult, that two (but very important) words were inserted into the text by an over-eager Christian scribe. Perhaps it was included in an early copy as a speculative footnote, and was later incorporated into the body of the text. It is also interesting to note that the second Josephan passage on Jesus is of less importance than the first. If the first passage is genuine, the second is far less detailed and noteworthy. If the *Testimonium Flavianum* is fraudulent, it is also possible that the second passage is fraudulent. Indeed, with the possible or likely fraudulent nature of the first passage, the second passage potentially raises questions as to who Josephus thinks this "Christ" is, given that he had otherwise not mentioned him. Furthermore, this passage makes no supernatural claims about Jesus (such as the all-important resurrection), so does not support the existence of the Biblical Jesus.

While there are disagreements over the authenticity of these verses, it is important to realise that even if authentic, these verses do not necessarily confirm anything useful about Jesus. Apart from the general limitations shared by virtually all extra-Biblical sources already mentioned, a precedent for discussion of mythical and supernatural characters is potentially set by Josephus' references to Hercules.[97] Josephus also seems happy to refer to the supernatural, retelling a story about how Onias prayed for rain, with his god positively responding.[98] Josephus goes on to claim that he witnessed Eleazar drawing out a demon from a possession victim's nostrils.[99] In other words, by modern reckoning, Josephus was not even that great a historian.

If critical historians are expected to accept Josephus without question when it comes to his questionable Jesus references, perhaps his witness to the existence of other gods and demons should also be accepted without question. It is also noteworthy that while scholars understand Josephus could not have been an eyewitness to any event of Jesus' life, he fails to mention his sources for his information on Jesus. If authentic in the first place, it will never be known whether Josephus received accurate information from official government records, or whether the information

is simply hearsay from Christian believers. If it would have been rare for ancient historians such as Josephus to name their sources, scholars need to accept this limitation, and accept the resulting uncertainty, rather than lower the standards of evidence and critical thinking for convenience.

Tacitus

In his *Annals*, Roman historian Tacitus makes a possible reference to Jesus (15.44):

> Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

It is the phrase in the middle of this passage, referring to Christus and his death under Pontius Pilate that is of great interest. It could be that this phrase (or even the whole passage) could also be a later Christian interpolation. While some scholars could argue that this passage must be genuine because it does not portray Christians and Christ in a totally positive manner (much like the Talmudic references to Jesus), there are reasons to have doubts over the authenticity or legitimacy of this passage. It is interesting that the name ‘Jesus’, ‘Jesus, son of Joseph’ or ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ is never used, and that this is Tacitus’ only supposed reference to Jesus.

It is unlikely that a non-Christian historian would refer to this person as ‘Christ’ (a term of religious significance to Christians), rather than the more secular ‘Jesus of Nazareth’. A Christian scribe however, would have no issue in calling him ‘Christ’. Given that ‘Jesus’ is not specified, there is also the possibility that this refers to another ‘Christ’ or messiah-figure. Though *Annals* covers the period of Rome’s history from around 14CE to 66CE, no other mention is made of ‘Jesus Christ’.[100] This passage is also ignored by early Christian apologists such as Origen and Tertullian, who actually quotes Tacitus in the third century.

Tacitus, born after Jesus' death (and perhaps after Paul started writing his epistles), could not have been an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life. He could well be repeating what a Christian believer is claiming. Many scholars dismiss this passage as Christian hearsay. And as with the second passage from Josephus, this passage at best only discusses a 'Historical Jesus', not the magical 'Biblical Jesus'. There is also some question over Tacitus' reliability as historian, particularly when he calls the prefect Pontius Pilate a procurator, although he could possibly have been both.[101] Also of interest is that this supposed reference to the death of Jesus is made in Book 15 (covering CE62-65), rather than in Book 5 (covering CE29-31). Though Tacitus supposedly claims the death of Christ happened during the reign of Tiberius, Tacitus makes no mention of Jesus in the books he wrote covering the reign of Tiberius; he only makes this one passing comment among the books covering the reign of Nero, which is quite odd.

Furthermore, most of Book 5 and the beginning of Book 6 (covering CE32-37) of the *Annals* is lost.[102] The *Annals* is suspiciously missing information from 29CE to 32CE, a highly relevant timeframe for those that believe in Jesus! Professor of Classics Robert Drews theorises that the only plausible explanation for this gap is "pious fraud"; that the embarrassment of Tacitus making no mention of Jesus' crucifixion (or associated events such as the darkness covering the world or the appearances of resurrected saints, as well as the resurrection, of course) led to Christian scribes destroying this portion of the text (and perhaps later fabricating the Book 15 reference).[103] Richard Carrier further argues that Tacitus' later discussion on Christianity (in his coverage of 64CE) gives historians confidence that this gap cannot be merely explained by the removal of embarrassing claims made about Jesus (with the silence potentially being the most embarrassing point of all), and points to similarly missing books by Philo and another suspicious gap in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*.[104]

Despite Cassius Dio (a Roman historian of the second and third centuries) having elsewhere discussed King Herod's death,[105] his *Roman History* is missing the years from 6BCE to 2BCE. It seems obvious

that Christian embarrassment over the lack of mention of Jesus' birth (and associated events as mentioned in the Gospels, such as the 'Massacre of the Innocents') led Christians to remove this portion of the text. Carrier is soon to publish on more of these 'relevant omissions', which shall form part of his upcoming book on the implausibility of the Historical Jesus. It is surely no coincidence that historical works preserved in the hands of Christians would be specifically missing years coinciding with Jesus' birth and death. Justin Martyr, when supposedly arguing with Trypho, interestingly fails to mention the Tacitean passage (as well as the Josephan passages), relying instead on "doctrines that are inspired by the Divine Spirit".[106] These curious gaps not only raise doubt on the Biblical Jesus, they even allow us to be suspicious over whether even some form of insignificant 'historical' Jesus existed at all.

Thallus (and Phlegon)

The ninth-century Byzantine historian George Syncellus allegedly quotes third-century Christian chronicler Sextus Julius Africanus (whose works are lost), who allegedly quoted second-century (possibly first-century) historian Thallus (whose works are also lost).[107] According to Syncellus, Africanus (*Chronography* 18.1) said the following:

> On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and the rest of the world were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the Passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun… Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth…[108]

Thallus, of who little is known, allegedly mentioned a "darkness", which Christians may like to think refers to the darkness around the time

of Jesus' death. Historians do not know what Thallus said (for example, if he mentioned Jesus), if he said what Africanus supposedly claims he said, if Syncellus is accurately reporting Africanus' words, or when Thallus may have said it. This is at least a third-hand report, appearing centuries after Jesus' death, and so offers nothing convincing whatsoever in establishing Jesus' miracle claims, or even his historicity. Africanus also comments on Greek historian Phlegon (reported among the works of Syncellus and Origen), which generally shares the same issues as with the Thallus passage.[109]

Pliny, Suetonius and Mara bar Serapion

There exist a handful of ambiguous (they do not name Jesus of Nazareth for example) reports that add very little to the debate over Jesus. In his second-century discussions with Emperor Trajan, Roman author Pliny the Younger (CE61-ca.112) made some references (book 10, letter 97) to Christians, such as the following:

> They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a stated day before it was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity… but all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition.[110]

Praying to Christ (or any other activity directed towards Christ) says nothing of whether Christ existed or not, any more than worshipping a god/person in any other religion would prove the existence of that god/person. As with the Tacitean passage, the identity of the Christ (i.e. Jesus of Nazareth, or Jesus bar Joseph) is not made explicit. There could be other people that are considered to be the Christ/Messiah/Saviour. Ehrman acknowledges that Pliny does not provide evidence that confirms the historical Jesus, let alone a divine Jesus.[111] From Suetonius' (CE ca.70-ca.130) *Life of Claudius*:

> Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.[112]

Chrestus is a Greek name, meaning 'the good', so does not necessarily have to refer to Jesus.[113] Note that Christians are also not specified,

though many early Christians were undoubtedly Jews. This passage offers little to no information about Jesus of Nazareth.[114] From *A Letter of Mara, Son of Serapion*, by Syrian philosopher Mara bar Serapion, scholars find:

> For what benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death, seeing that they received as retribution for it famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, seeing that in one hour the whole of their country was covered with sand? Or the Jews by the murder of their Wise King, seeing that from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them? For with justice did God grant a recompense to the wisdom of all three of them. For the Athenians died by famine; and the people of Samos were covered by the sea without remedy; and the Jews, brought to desolation and expelled from their kingdom, are driven away into every land. Nay, Socrates did "not" die, because of Plato; nor yet Pythagoras, because of the statue of Hera; nor yet the Wise King, because of the new laws which he enacted.[115]

There is no reference here to a 'Jesus' or a 'Christ', but only to an unnamed "wise king". Furthermore, the historical philosophers Pythagoras and Socrates are specifically named, unlike the unknown "wise king". This passage also seems to blame the Jews for murdering this figure, while the canonical Gospels claim that it was the Romans who killed Jesus,[116] although "the Jews" could also be seen to be responsible.[117] Doherty also questions the likelihood that a pagan writer such as Mara would place Jesus on the same level as "household names" such as Socrates and Pythagoras.[118] But again, there is nothing here that can realistically support the belief in the supernatural Christ of Faith.

The Talmud

There are a number of references to various characters called Jesus in the Jewish Talmud (specifically from the *Gemara*), which may or may not reference Jesus of Nazareth. Given that the *Gemara* is among the latest of all these sources (around the fifth and sixth centuries), and is a religious text that makes use of earlier religious texts (such as the canonical Gospels[119] and the Old Testament scriptures), it offers little to no useful information with regards to Jesus. One factor that may support the Talmud's use here is the unflattering portrayal of Jesus,[120] rather than no Jesus at all; though that would depend on knowing that these are indeed

references to Jesus of Nazareth. This cannot be known with certainty as Jesus/Joshua/Yeshua/Yeshu is a very common Jewish/Aramaic name, found often in the Talmud and among the works of Josephus (such as Jesus ben Pandira, Jesus bar Phabet and Jesus bar Gamaliel).

Other: Gnostic gospels, Church Father writings and hypothetical sources

There are other potential sources such as the so-called Gnostic gospels, and writings of the early Church Fathers, but they are generally seen as being inauthentic and/or very late;[121] the main Christian sources being the canonical Gospels. The one exception may be the *Gospel of Thomas* (examined in the next chapter as a potential link between the alleged mythical Christ of Paul and the 'historicised' Jesus of the Gospels), which appears to be a sayings document rather than having actual narrative of Jesus' life,[122] and manifests no interest in Jesus' salvific death and resurrection.[123] As for hypothetical or otherwise non-extant sources (such as oral tradition and *Q*), they cannot be verified or scrutinised, so cannot seriously be used as evidence for or against Jesus' existence; though *Q* could also provide an interesting evolutionary link between Paul's writings and Mark's Gospel.

In any case, with the relatively early texts of Paul, the more complete narratives of the Gospels, and the fact that most believers would reject such non-Biblical books as authoritative, it would be appropriate to focus more effort on analysing the existing books of the New Testament. It is interesting to note however, how much credibility is given by some scholars to sources that do not exist – a ridiculous situation to be sure. In Ehrman's *Did Jesus Exist* (a recently published book, the very existence of which suggests Jesus' very historicity is becoming increasingly questioned), he apparently solves the problem of having so few early sources on Jesus, by non-eyewitnesses, long after the events in question, by simply inventing as many early sources as he desires.

Ehrman simply makes up the sources he would like to have available. He claims that the canonical Gospels stem from "numerous" earlier

written sources (from about the 50's CE), and "enormous" amounts of oral traditions (from about the 30's CE).[124] He divides the book of Acts, claiming that it provides two independent witnesses.[125] Ehrman then applies the same methods to the writings of Ignatius.[126] Ehrman, like the conservative Bible scholars he disagrees with, seems to claim that any time there is a different story (say in a later Gospel, compared to an earlier Gospel), or a paraphrased story (as in the case with Ignatius), he has convincing evidence of an earlier and independent account (which is assumedly reliable and trustworthy), which "obviously" must have even earlier sources behind them that go right back to Jesus.

He somehow overlooks the possibility that the same story is evolving over time, or that later writers are merely repeating the stories in their own words (and inventing details as they go along), and seems quite content to make such incredible and assertive claims using *non-existent sources*. Ehrman's outrageous brand of historical methodology does not provide evidence for even a historical Jesus; and if the case for Jesus is so air-tight, it would be wholly unnecessary for respected scholars such as Ehrman to resort to 'creating' sources, and 'dating' these non-existing sources to appear much earlier than the Pauline Epistles. It seems that great effort is expended in placing the Gospel traditions before the Pauline Epistles... The implications of the Pauline Epistles on how we ought to view Jesus will be discussed in the next chapter.

All these extra-Biblical sources have numerous issues that raise questions as to their relevance and integrity, including: being written decades or centuries after the alleged events, being written by non-eyewitnesses, being susceptible to fraud, being ambiguous, saying virtually nothing on the miraculous claims about Jesus, and in "many" (Ehrman is unable to quantify the multitude of his non-existent sources – that's how many they are!) cases, being non-existent. Scholars of all types find many reasons to have doubts over the use of these extra-Biblical sources in establishing a historical Jesus, let alone a supernatural Jesus. It is clear that the focus should be on the Biblical sources, which we have already deemed unreliable, with particular attention paid to the Gospel of Mark.

Mark's burden

The Gospel of Mark plays a crucial role in establishing a Biblical Jesus, and possibly in establishing a more mundane Historical Jesus. While some of the epistles (by Paul or author authors) may make earlier references to Jesus, Mark's Gospel is the first *somewhat* complete (though most of the childhood and adulthood of Jesus is missing) narrative of Jesus' life, and also the first to place Jesus in a historical setting. The epistles have very little to say about Jesus' life, and according to some scholars may be alluding to a non-literal Jesus (this will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter). *Q* is a hypothetical source, and along with the *Gospel of Thomas* (which could have originated in some form in the first century, between Paul's first writings and Mark's Gospel),[127] generally contains only sayings, rather than detailed narrative.[128]

If the epistles and sayings documents are inauthentic, lack biographical detail, or are referring to a non-literal Jesus, the Gospels are crucial in establishing Jesus as a literal human being in a specific historical (and earthly) setting. Given that the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John come after and seemingly expand on Mark's Gospel, the reliability of Mark's Gospel as historical testimony is paramount. It is no wonder that Ehrman indicates that the Gospels make the best testimony to Jesus' life,[129] while Carrier expresses doubt on all sources post-Mark, Biblical or extra-Biblical, as Mark could have "tainted" them all.[130] If Mark's Gospel (and perhaps Matthew's, Luke's and John's) is not meant to be understood as a sober and objective biography, establishing the 'truth' of Jesus becomes virtually impossible. Whether Mark can live up to its prominent position is examined soon. First, a quick note on the disputed genre of the Gospels.

The genre of the Canonical Gospels

The New Testament Gospels are “our best historical sources” with regards to information on Jesus’ life.[131] If they were intended to be accurate historical biographies, they no doubt deserve serious consideration. If they were not intended to present accurate historical information, then significant doubt about the entire Jesus story (and not just the supernatural elements) is justifiable. It is not a foregone conclusion that the canonical Gospels are historically reliable biographies. Many specialist scholars understand that there really is no ‘scholarly consensus’ that these Gospels are completely accurate and reliable.

Given the anonymity of the Gospels (among other problems) it may never be known with certainty what genre they fall into, how reliable the authors were, what the authors’ intentions really were, and crucially, whether they intended readers to take them at face value. While conservative Christian believers may prefer to accept these books as accurate in all aspects, and sceptics may want to dismiss them entirely, mainstream Biblical scholars tend to fall somewhere in the middle, and there is no complete agreement over what genre the Gospels actually fall into.[132] Price leaves no confusion as to his position, claiming that Jesus’ life story echoes that of the “Mythic Hero Archetype” (alluding to numerous parallel plot elements found in the stories of many mythical hero characters):

> The Gospel story itself is pure legend. What can we say of a supposed historical figure whose life story conforms virtually in every detail to the Mythic Hero Archetype, with nothing, no “secular” or mundane information, left over?[133]

Respected theologian Thomas L. Thompson says the assumption that the Gospels portray a historical Jesus is not justified.[134] Most credible scholars have doubts over the Gospels’ reliability. Randel Helms says that the Gospels are largely fictional accounts and also dismisses the idea that oral tradition can be trusted, calling it unstable, and open to mythical and fictional embellishment.[135] John Dominic Crossan also expresses some issues with the Gospels’ reliability, saying that oral tradition is something that has been abused in scholarship. He further remarks:

> The first gospel, Mark, is around the year 70. So within 70 and, say, 95, we have the four gospels. 25 years. But that leaves 70 to 30. 40 years before that. If you watch the

> creativity within that 25 year span, from Mark being copied into Matthew and Luke, possibly also by John, then you have to face the creativity of that 40 years, even when you don't have written gospels. And that may be equally intense.[136]

Crossan elaborates on what he means by "creativity", explaining that the Gospels contain fabrications and mythology.[137] So much for apologists' claims that there simply was 'not enough time' for people to make stuff up about Jesus! Crossan also notes that the Gospels are problematic, due to their many contradictions.[138] New Testament expert Harold Attridge proclaims that early Christians understood the stories allegorically (not literally):

> Early Christians certainly read scripture allegorically, understanding it to refer to some kind of so-called higher realities that weren't really present in the text itself. They could interpret it morally, as giving advice for life.[139]

Religious scholar and historian Paula Fredriksen bluntly says that the Gospels are not biographies:

> The gospels are very peculiar types of literature. They're not biographies. I mean, there are all sorts of details about Jesus that they're simply not interested in giving us. They are a kind of religious advertisement. What they do is proclaim their individual author's interpretation of the Christian message through the device of using Jesus of Nazareth as a spokesperson for the evangelist's position.[140]

Robert M. Price asserts that the New Testament Gospels (and Acts, which is generally seen as the 'second half' of Luke) are a kind of Old Testament *midrash* or exegesis.[141] He essentially sees the Gospels as a later re-imagining of the Old Testament. This idea that the Gospels refer more to the Old Testament (or even other ancient sources) than to recent and actual events could make sense of the Apostle Paul's reference to Jesus' death and resurrection "according to the Scriptures", rather than "according to validated eyewitness accounts".[142] This idea also gives a more naturalistic explanation for the near-miraculous number of Old Testament prophecies that Jesus supposedly fulfilled in the New Testament... Price notes that this midrashic tendency is evident even from the very first verses of the first canonical Gospel:

> 1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare

> your way” 3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”[143]

One example cited by Price is the story of Jesus’ ‘stilling of the storm’ in Mark 4:35-41. He argues that the basis for the story can be found in Jonah 1:4-6, where Jonah (like Jesus) can be found sleeping during the ordeal, and eventually led to the stilling of the storm.[144] Price then theorises that Mark’s passage was elaborated by another storm story provided by Psalms 107:23-29. Price finds direct parallels between John’s ‘water into wine’ story (John 2:1-11) and the Septuagint’s account of 1Kings 17:8-24. Both stories involve a rebuke, empty pitchers (from which “sustenance miraculously emerges”), and people placing their faith in the central character because of this feat.[145]

He demonstrates many more examples of Old Testament parallels (and potential sources of extrapolation or influence) with the Gospel narratives, including: the nativity of Jesus, Jesus’ baptism, Jesus’ temptations, the recruitment of the first disciples, the exorcism at Capernaum, the healing of a leper, the healing of a paralytic, the walking on the sea, Jesus’ transfiguration, and the entry into Jerusalem. Parallels are also found with Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree, the last supper, the idea of a scapegoat, Jesus’ crucifixion, the empty tomb, Jesus’ ascension, Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch, and Paul’s conversion.[146]

Price provides many more examples and alludes to many other parallels that various scholars have speculated on.[147] Carrier highlights many parallels between the story of ‘Daniel in the lion’s den’ and the Gospels’ ‘empty tomb’ story, demonstrating mathematically why it is more likely that this Jesus tradition was fabricated.[148] Richard Carrier also notes that, “Biographies were also written of non-existent people (like Romulus, Numa, Coriolanus, Hercules, and Aesop).”[149] Early critics such as Trypho and Celsus also criticised the fictions associated with Jesus.[150] Ehrman admits that “The Gospels do portray Jesus in ways that are non-historical.”[151] These criticisms are not even limited to non-believers; early Christian theologian, Origen, who seemed to favour allegorical readings, explains that the Gospels have discrepancies and need to be understood ‘spiritually’:

> The spiritual truth was often preserved, as one might say, in the material falsehood... So much I have said of the apparent discrepancies in the Gospels, and of my desire to have them treated in the way of spiritual interpretation.[152]

Research by New Testament scholar Jerome Neyrey on the composition of John's Gospel reveals that it is structured in a way so as to be *persuasive* in portraying Jesus as a figure worthy of praise; a trend he also finds among the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.[153] This is not surprising, as all the canonical Gospels demonstrate their less than subtle evangelistic purpose in promoting a 'supernatural Jesus',[154] raising questions as to their status as sober and objective historical biographies, and to the Gospel authors' intentions. An indicator that the Gospels might indeed be biographical accounts comes from the beginning of Luke's Gospel, which is the only canonical Gospel with such an introduction.[155] The anonymous author of Luke claims to have "carefully investigated everything from the beginning", indicating that the author is not a contemporary – and thus not an eyewitness – but that he is doing historical research. The latter point is problematic, given that Luke does not discuss his methods, name his sources, or show any scepticism with the various claims made about Jesus. Luke also fails to clarify his credentials, or even his identity.

Appealing to the work of Josephus, theologian David Moessner argues that Luke 1:3 can be interpreted to mean that Luke is a contemporary of the events, leaving open the possibility that he is an eyewitness.[156] This is also a problematic theory, given that Luke starts his tale before the birth of Jesus[157] (which would make Luke almost impossibly old, especially for a Christian in a time when martyrs were all the rage!) and like an omniscient narrator, seems to be able to describe what happens when Jesus is alone, and the disciples are asleep.[158] Another interpretation of the verse is provided by the literal meaning of *ἄνωθεν* (rendered in the New International Version as "from the beginning"), which is "from above". Given the subject matter, such as the supernatural claims of Luke's Gospel, it would be appropriate that this Gospel's author is claiming that his knowledge of Jesus comes from his 'direct channel to the divine'. If, like Paul, Luke's source is revelation "from above", or "from Heaven" (cf. James 3:17), his credibility as a historian is highly questionable.

Given that the Gospels are anonymous, scholars cannot be certain who wrote them, and why. The genre of the Gospels is still up for debate, and probably always will be. Whether scholars call them 'midrash', allegorical fiction or something else, it is obvious that the Gospels are not objective, historical biographies, written by reputable, reliable, and critical authors. There is considerable doubt regarding the genre, intent, and thus, the reliability of these texts. That the Gospels are not completely trustworthy sources of history raises big doubts as to the miraculous claims about Jesus, and even give cause to be doubtful over the more mundane claims.

Mark's failure

The crucial role Mark's gospel plays in Jesus research was stressed earlier. Texts preceding the Gospel of Mark may be referring to an entirely non-literal Jesus (theorised in the next chapter), while texts appearing later could very well be "tainted" by Mark, as Carrier explains:

> The only overt evidence of his existence can be tied in one way or another to a single source: the Gospel of Mark, which could have been written as late as 80 or 90 A.D., fifty years after the events it is supposed to describe, and which is unmistakably a hagiography rather than a history or biography, whose interest seems more cultural than factual (see my "Review of The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark"). All additional evidence, though still adding weight to any case for historicity, is either too vague to be conclusive, or tainted by association with this document.[159]

For a document on which so much relies, the Gospel of Mark has many characteristics that could diminish the trust scholars place in it as a reliable source for Jesus' life story. The author of Mark is unknown, and it was written around four decades or more after the death of Jesus. No original copy of Mark exists; the oldest manuscript which contains *some sections* of Mark's Gospel, *Papyrus 45*, dates to the third century (while the events in Mark supposedly happened in the first century). Possible source material for Mark is also unknown; if any primary sources were consulted, scholars cannot know how accurately such material was reported. Mark's credibility is questionable, partly due to his appeals to the supernatural[160] and obvious evangelical intention. The very first verse of Mark's Gospel labels the work as the "good news" (*euangélion*)

rather than as an accurate and objective historical account.[161] The gospel of Mark captures only the last portion of Jesus' life, from his baptism to his death. Key narratives such as his allegedly miraculous birth and triumphant resurrection are not included.

There are more reasons to doubt Mark's reliability, such as the tampering evident with the addition of Mark16:9-20.[162] Mark's Gospel also ends with a potential message of hope,[163] rather than Jesus' resurrection, which could indicate that the story was not intended to be taken literally. If Jesus' resurrection actually occurred, and Mark is objectively jotting down historical facts, quite some time after the events supposedly happened, merely alluding to Jesus' return is inexcusable. Mark could have easily added that Jesus rose from the dead and could just as easily have given us a list of reliable eyewitnesses. Also, like the author, the genre of Mark is unknown, though it does contain fabrications and myth.[164] Mark is also the shortest of the canonical Gospels, which is consistent with the common mythicist argument that the Jesus story had evolved over time.[165]

As demonstrated by Price, and many other Bible scholars before him, much of the Gospel of Mark parallels the Old Testament's account of Israel's history. Events in Jesus' life have parallels with events in the lives of Old Testament figures (whose relative existences are also becoming increasingly-questioned by scholars) such as Adam, Moses, Elijah and David.[166] Many specialist scholars identify such Old Testament parallels and are critical of Mark's Gospel. Joel Marcus recognised the heavy influence of the Old Testament on Mark,[167] while twentieth-century theologian William Wrede, described Mark's Gospel as theological fiction and noted that if so much of the material is unhistorical, then having doubts on what remains is "extremely natural".[168] Burton Mack boldly proclaims Mark's "obvious fiction":

> As for the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, Mark took the basic ideas from the Christ myth but dared to imagine how the crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ might have looked if played out as a historical event in Jerusalem, something the Christ myth resisted. Thus Mark's story is best understood as a studied combination of Jesus traditions with the Christ myth. The combination enhanced Jesus' importance as a historical figure by casting him as the son of God or the Christ and by working out an elaborate plot to link his fate to the history of Mark's community. We may therefore call

> Mark's gospel a myth of origin for the Markan community. It was imagined in order to understand how history could have gone the way it had and the Jesus movement still be right about its loyalties and views… We do not usually think of mythmaking as the achievement of a moment or the work of a single writer no matter how brilliant. But in Mark's case we have an obvious fiction, masterly composed by someone who had to be doing his work at a desk as any author would. It was Mark's fiction that soon became the accepted story of the way to imagine Jesus appearing in the world.[169]

The timing of the appearance of Mark's Gospel (and indeed the later Gospels) is noteworthy as being a time of great upheaval for the Jews. It is not known who Mark was, but the timing of his Gospel's creation could provide a clue as to his intentions. Perhaps it is mere coincidence that the Gospel of Mark is created around the time of the First Jewish-Roman War and the destruction of Jerusalem,[170] when Jews may have wished for a Jewish saviour to defeat their enemies (recall the previous discussion of the 'Jamesian Jesus'). Or perhaps this is when Paul's "visionary Christ" (theorised by mythicists and historicists alike)[171] finally appears in the flesh in Judaea, leaving with a message of hope by the end of Mark's gospel.[172]

Scholars may wonder if Mark's hint that Jesus could render the Temple superfluous[173] coincidentally coincides with the destruction of the temple by the Romans; perhaps paving the way for a 'new temple' (and 'new religion') for disillusioned Jews, much as the compiling (and study) of the Torah during the Babylonian exile may have partly been a reaction to the destruction of the First Temple.[174] It would seem obvious that the Gospel of Mark should not be understood in a literal sense. It is a text that serves numerous purposes, none of which seems to be the accurate recording of authentic historical information.

It can be argued that Mark is the key to understanding the historical Jesus; so historians would reasonably hope for Mark to be objective, accurate, thorough, and lacking in implausible and miraculous claims. In that regards, Mark has utterly failed. The Gospel of Mark itself however, is not necessarily a 'failure'. It may be that religious believers have simply failed to truly understand the real intent and meaning of Mark's Gospel, and the creation of the character of Jesus Christ. Mark may only be a failure if it is expected to be a reliable and objective piece of historical writing. But perhaps that was *never* the author's intent. The

Gospels' very first parable (Mark 4:1-20) has Jesus explaining that (Mark 4:11-12) there are two levels of truth (one for the elite, and one for the masses, perhaps akin to the symbolism and allegory of mystery religions, [175] and the potential therefore for multiple interpretations), and that this parable is *crucial* to understanding all his parables (Mark 4:13). Seems like a big hint!

Significantly, the version of this parable in the (possibly older) *Gospel of Thomas* is more concise and lacks the explanation; perhaps this Gospel, generally devoid of narrative, needed no explanation of the symbolic nature of its teachings – it was simply assumed that people knew it was symbolic. Also, the narrative around the parable in Mark's version seems to be filled with symbolic imagery, such as that Jesus is separated from the masses (just as in truths and knowledge) by water (which may need traversing). It would be highly appropriate then if the entire Gospel of Mark was intended as a meta-parable; that none of it is intended to be taken literally.

This would further harmonise with scholars who discuss the midrashic-type tendencies of the canonical Gospels and the possibility that proper names in the Gospel are puns reflecting their purpose in the story (such as Nicodemus, whose name means "ruler of the people", being described in John 3:1 as a "ruler of the Jews").[176] Interestingly, though used earlier, Jesus' name, meaning "Yahweh is salvation", seems highly appropriate to his greater (alleged) identity and role in the larger story. There is still ongoing debate as to the intended genre of the Gospel of Mark, and of the other canonical Gospels (and also of the other New Testament texts). There are *numerous* reasons to doubt the historical reliability of these anonymous writings.

Concluding remarks

When it comes to the divine, miracle-working Biblical Jesus, the Biblical texts do nothing to historically support this incredibly implausible hypothetical character. Even when it comes to the so-called 'Historical Jesus', a theorised 'normal' mortal man who was pretty much

insignificant, and who poses no problems for the easy-going non-believer or vocal anti-Christian, the sources give us plenty of reasons to be doubtful. We cannot even be sure that this 'stripped down' version of Jesus must have existed. After all, scholars trying to convince us of such a 'Historical Jesus' generally just take the Biblical Jesus, and strip away all the Jesus-ey bits that make Jesus, Jesus. Jesus! The arguments of scholars that insist there was at least some sort of historical Jesus tend to privilege the Christian faith, and depend much on poor sources and even non-existent sources.

That a historical Jesus could *possibly* have existed is not up for debate. That is true of all figures, mythical or historical, whether there are surviving sources mentioning them or not. Given the lack of primary source evidence, reliance on highly questionable secondary sources, and questions over the genre of the Gospels (which include much non-historical and legendary material), it would seem that considerable doubt as to Jesus' historicity is justified, especially given the many issues with the non-Biblical sources. The mythicist argument that the New Testament epistles (particularly Paul's) refer to a completely non-literal Jesus then becomes a crucial issue; the epistles could be the key to unlocking the puzzle concerning the historical (or mythical) Jesus.

Chapter 3: The earliest sources indicate a non-literal Jesus

So far, the focus has been on explaining why there is little to no reason in accepting the 'Biblical Jesus' or 'Christ of Faith'. Although, given that the sources are the same, we have inevitably discussed the possibility that even a toned-down 'Historical Jesus' (on whom the Biblical Jesus was supposedly based) also did not exist. This view is often known as Jesus mythicism, or the Jesus Myth Theory, or JMT for short. Such a mundane Jesus is typically accepted by many non-believers, as there is nothing particularly implausible about the idea of a man preaching his different ideas, especially in first-century Palestine, when many people (quite a few of which who were named Jesus) did just that, all taking place around the time of one of Israel's greatest losses.

That Jesus may not have existed at all, however, is a possibility. One bolstered not only by the fact that there really are no reliable and early sources mentioning him, but even by the nature of the very earliest Jesus sources. Jesus mythicism is not at all necessary for non-belief, or 'atheism'. But if it is a true, or even a plausible hypothesis, it does obviously irreparable damage to Christian claims. It is a fact that not all early Christians agreed completely on the nature of Jesus. Some early Christians (such as the second-century Docetists) for example, did not believe in a literal, flesh-and-blood Jesus, leaving open the possibility that some believed in a Jesus who was entirely mythical (i.e. fictitious).

Some Christians may have lacked belief in a Jesus that literally appeared on Earth, whether as a human, or a phantom. According to various Jesus mythicists, such a 'mystical', 'heavenly', 'Platonic' or 'cosmic' Jesus can be found in the New Testament epistles, particularly in the writings of Paul. If Paul's Jesus (who happens to be the 'first Jesus' appearing in the historical record) can be shown to derive not from verified historical sources but from older religious texts and Paul's imagination, there is good reason to doubt whether there ever existed a literal Jesus of Nazareth. And even if Paul's Jesus is fleshly or human, it

could be an intermediate link in an evolving story that had entirely mythical origins.

Great efforts have been made by Jesus historicists to try and make the canonical Gospels appear earlier in the historical record (such as Bart Ehrman's reliance on numerous hypothetical sources);[177] it would seem that Paul's epistles cause significant problems to the claims of Jesus' historicity. The possibility that Paul refers to a Jesus that did not visit Earth as a human being, in recent history, makes for an interesting theory. Many scholars have recognised that the Jesus that appears in the Pauline letters (and other epistles) is very different from the Jesus that appears in the canonical Gospels.

This is of particular interest to historical Jesus studies as the Gospels appear substantially later in the record. If the first image of Jesus is one that is purely spiritual or 'heavenly', the idea that the origins of Jesus are entirely fictitious seems more plausible. If the traditional story of Jesus of Nazareth can be shown to evolve from more mystical stories to more historical ones, it could arguably be more probable that Jesus had entirely mythical origins; that he never existed at all.

The earliest witness' sources

There is no doubt among mythicists that Paul's witness is crucial to the question over Jesus' historicity. The Gospels provide the more complete story of Jesus, but appear many decades after Jesus' supposed death. Paul's writings are generally taken to appear on record much earlier than the Gospels, so are closer to the life of Jesus (though still not contemporary). With no primary sources to compare the Gospels with, Paul's earlier documents take on even greater importance. It is interesting then to consider what it is that Paul says about Jesus, without reading the Gospels (which were composed later) into Paul's writings.

Religious Studies scholar William Arnal calls for such an approach to be used, noting that the canonical Gospels and Acts (an even later document) have affected how early Christians and Biblical scholars view the Pauline Epistles, and Paul himself, arguing that Paul could be understood to be a somewhat independent evangelising Jew, rather than a "Christian".[178] Before Paul's claims are examined however, it would be pertinent to consider his sources. Thankfully, Paul specifically names his sources:

> 11 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.[179]

> 15 But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.[180]

> 23 For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread;[181]

> 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures…[182]

It seems that even when it comes to key Christian doctrines such as the resurrection of Jesus, Paul gets his information from the Old Testament scriptures. Not only does Paul never mention his possible reliable, first-hand accounts, even when Paul seems to quote Jesus, his only named sources are the Old Testament scriptures, and his 'direct channel' to the divine 'Lord'. He did not witness the events of Jesus' life (nor does he specifically say when and where they happened), nor can it be assumed that he learned of these events from fellow mortal humans (such as Peter and James); he specifically rules this out (surprising, if he knew Jesus' relatives and closest followers).[183] In any case, Paul did not seem to have a pleasant relationship with Peter, presumably one of the most credible and sought-after eyewitnesses, as he "opposed him to his face".[184] Scholar of Religion James Tabor also notes Paul's odd sources:

> This mean the essentials of the message Paul preaches is not coming from those who were with Jesus, whom Paul sarcastically calls the "so-called pillars of the church" – adding "what they are means nothing to me" (Galatians 2:6), but from voices, visions, and revelations that Paul is "hearing" and "seeing." For some that is a strong foundation. For many, including most historians such "traditions" can not be taken as reliable historical testimony.[185]

It may be asked why scholars should assume that Peter and James could have taught Paul anything worthwhile about the historical Jesus anyway; historians know of the massive role they played largely because of the Gospels, which appear *later* in the historical record, and thus could be elaborating on Paul's more basic story. Without reading the Gospels into the Epistles, perhaps Peter's and James' experiences of Jesus were similar to Paul's. Either Paul is not being historically truthful about his sources (allowing scholars to further doubt his writings), or he is telling the truth: all Paul knows of Jesus comes from what was already written centuries earlier (akin to the theorised Old Testament midrashic-type tendencies of the Gospels), and from his own imagination.

That Paul could be writing in a midrashic-style is perhaps evidenced by the reference in 1Corinthians 15:4 to the Messiah's rising on the third day, which is not explicitly stated in the Old Testament, despite his saying that he knows this partly because of the Old Testament scriptures (the other part is his own creativity). Richard Carrier would agree:

> Even in Galatians 1, Paul is explicitly denying not only that he received any human tradition, but that such traditions would even have any worth to him or his fellow Christians. When we combine that fact, with what we know of the literary practices of the time, in the way stories and biographies were fabricated from sayings by (or even just attributed to) famous people (which often included nonexistent people), the mythicist case does not look as improbable as Ehrman portrays it.[186]

Paul goes on to mention Jesus' 'after-death' appearances (verses 5-8), yet fails to mention any 'before-death' appearances. Regarding these appearances in 1Corinthians chapter 15, Paul consistently uses the Greek word *ophthe*, which is often used in the New Testament to describe the appearance of a spiritual being, such as with Moses' and Elijah's appearances at Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17:3, Mark 9:4), God's appearance to Abraham (Acts 7:2), and Jesus' spiritual appearance to Paul (1Corinthians 15:8). Jesus historicists potentially face a problem. The

author of the earliest extant writings of Jesus makes no reference to recent historical sources; he could even be the 'creator' of the Jesus character.

This idea is heretical to those that believe in the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus; but the Gospels appear *later* in the historical record, after the Pauline Epistles. One solution to this problem, proposed by Bart Ehrman (though he does not specifically admit it), and quite popular among Bible scholars, is to bring the Gospels forward, to make them older and pre-Pauline; he does this by 'creating', and somehow even dating numerous hypothetical written and oral sources.[187] Not only is Ehrman's hypothesising of sources he would like to have access to woefully inadequate historical methodology, but he shows his inconsistency and privileging of the Gospels by later deriding such an approach, if applied to other sources, such as the epistles themselves:

> Paul almost certainly did not write the letter to the Colossians. It is one of the forgeries in Paul's name, written after his death, as critical scholars have recognized for a very long time. And to argue that the passage derives from a pre-Pauline tradition is problematic. Colossians is *post*-Pauline, so on what grounds can we say that a passage in it is *pre*-Pauline?[188]

What Ehrman surprisingly and inconsistently says of Colossians, can also be said of the Gospels: "The Gospels are *post*-Pauline, so on what grounds can it be said that passages in them are *pre*-Pauline?" If Ehrman finds it problematic to assume that a later document contains earlier information, it is surprising that he thinks that a similar approach to the Gospels is perfectly acceptable, and even crucial to his case for Jesus' historicity! Consistency with this sort of scepticism would probably result in field-changing conclusions. Now that it has been identified that the sources for the very first extant stories of Jesus are completely inappropriate for historical research (imagine a history of Abraham Lincoln solely relying on ancient books written about Julius Caesar and alleged revelations from supernatural entities), and the extent to which scholars such as Ehrman try to resolve the problem by violating basic historical principles, the focus will move to the content of the Pauline and other Epistles that Jesus historicists might find so offensive to their views.

Paul's minimal, unquotable Jesus

> It is doubtless a fact in the history of Christian belief that for centuries, in a certain sense, the Gospel of Paul stood in the way of the Gospel of Jesus. How did this result come about? The attitude which Paul himself takes up towards the Gospel of Jesus is that he does not repeat it in the words of Jesus, and does not appeal to its authority.[189]

It is agreed by scholars who are Jesus historicists[190] and Jesus mythicists[191] that the Pauline Epistles (and the non-Gospel Biblical books in general) have very little to say about Jesus' teachings and deeds. This in itself is not necessarily a problem. It does seem slightly suspicious however, when it is documents that appear much later in the historical record (the canonical Gospels) that seemingly expand on the basic story presented in the Epistles; it would be logical that it would be the later (and more detailed) accounts that would be mythicized, not the earlier, more concise accounts.[192] Ehrman dismisses this relative silence of the Epistles, asserting, "That this was common knowledge should be clear from our Gospel sources…"[193]

These are of course Ehrman's made-up sources on which he relies so heavily; the Gospels are post-Pauline, so the conclusions would likely differ if historicists such as Ehrman actually treated them as such, and did not read the later Gospel story into the earlier texts. Now it is even more surprising that Paul finds himself in many situations where he could quote Jesus and thus proclaim his authority, yet does not:

> 1 Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. 2 One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.[194]

> 1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. 2 Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. 3 But whoever loves God is known by God. 4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one." 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. 7 But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols

> that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. 8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. 9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.[195]

> 20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?[196]

With regards to the dietary laws for example, Paul could have simply deferred to Jesus' authority, as mentioned in the Gospels:

> 14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them."[197]

Price identifies numerous other examples of Paul having the opportunity to simplify his task or to amplify his message with Jesus' authority, yet fails to.[198] When Paul recommended celibacy (1Corinthians 7:7-8), he could have quoted Matthew 19:10-12. When he indicates that Christians should pay their taxes (Romans 13:1-6), Paul could have quoted Mark 12:17. When discussing circumcision (Romans 3:1, Galatians 5:1-12), Paul could have referred to Jesus' own circumcision in Luke 2:21. When Paul (and also Peter) promotes obedience to the Roman authorities who generally punish only the wicked, [199] he seemingly 'forgot' what they did to Jesus![200] Instead of scoffing at the Jews who were demanding miracles (1Corinthians 1:22), Paul could have mentioned the multitude of miracles that Jesus supposedly performed, and which people found so convincing...

Even Ehrman acknowledges the greater issue that there are instances where Paul actually seems to be quoting Jesus, without giving him due credit (though Ehrman thinks that Paul is paraphrasing later documents; an illogical and presupposed conclusion).[201] Mark 1:22 shows the amazement of people witnessing Jesus teaching from his own authority,

unlike the Torah-touting Scribes. Perhaps Paul lacked Jesus' charisma; or there is another reason for why Paul fails to use Jesus' authority, and, like the Scribes (generally taken to be enemies of Jesus), relies on the Old Testament for his message. Jesus historicists noting these anomalies include Gerd Lüdemann:

> One must record with some surprise the fact that Jesus' teachings seem to play a less vital role in Paul's religious and ethical instruction than does the Old Testament... not once does Paul refer to Jesus as a teacher, to his words as teaching, or to Christians as disciples. In this regard it is of the greatest significance that when Paul cites "sayings of Jesus," they are never so designated; rather, without a single exception, he attributes such sayings to "the Lord."[202]

It is possible that Paul did not feel the need to invoke Jesus' authority, as his readers might already have known all of the teachings (and deeds) of Jesus. That explanation loses power however, given that we only know of these 'teachings of Jesus' because of post-Pauline documents. Scholars and believers alike must accept the very real possibility that such teachings or sayings actually originated with Paul (or even other religious traditions altogether), and only *later* were ascribed to Jesus, in the Gospels, or perhaps in 'sayings documents' such as *Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, which could have appeared in the historical record between the Pauline Epistles and the canonical Gospels.[203]

It could be that Paul – with his utter disinterest in Jesus' recent life events and teachings – presents a 'stripped-down' portrayal of the Jesus of the Gospels as apologists like to argue; given that Paul's writings appear earlier however, it should be considered more plausible that the Gospels are elaborating on Paul's Epistles. Whether Jesus existed or not, Paul seems completely disinterested in a recent, historical Jesus; as if such a concept would be of only secondary importance to Paul's primary aim: the spreading of Pauline theology, the spreading of his own message.

Paul's cosmic Christ

There is not a single verse among the Pauline Epistles that specifically ties Jesus' death (or indeed, his life) to a specific time and place. Thanks

to the canonical Gospels, Biblical historians tend to think that Jesus died in Jerusalem under the reign of Pontius Pilate. But the Gospels are *post-Pauline*, and cannot be assumed to contain the earliest traditions of Jesus. Scholars ought to consider the possibilities of what Paul is saying, without the knowledge of later documents that could merely be expanding on Paul's story. With that in consideration, the Epistles offer some curious passages that could indicate that the Jesus portrayed by Paul and the other epistle writers is not a fleshly, human Jesus that recently appeared on Earth:

> 3 Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. 4 If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.[204]

> 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [205]

> 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.[206]

Here is a Jesus that could be located in another realm, (i.e. a 'Platonic, mystical realm') and who is timeless. The Hebrews passage seems to refer to Jesus' not having been on Earth recently, while the hymn of Philippians indicates a Jesus who merely had the *appearance* of a man, and was only named "Jesus" and exalted by God *after* his death (there is a potential Old Testament parallel here with Jacob being named Israel *after* defeating Yahweh).[207] The quotation from Ephesians remarkably neglects any hint of recent historical evidence, referring instead to God's revelation, "now" (decades after the alleged events of the Gospels), and possibly alluding to Christianity's status as a 'pagan' mystery religion.

Mythicists such as Earl Doherty contend that such verses indicate a 'cosmic Christ'; one that did not appear on Earth, but in some sort of

Platonic ‘lower heaven’.[208] Whether this figure was purely spiritual or was indeed fleshly, such a view of Jesus would suggest that he may have originally been an entirely mythical figure that was later historicised, rather than a historical figure that was later mythicised, which is what secular Biblical scholars tend to believe. That Jesus was a mystery that is only “now” (the time of Paul and other epistle authors) being revealed by God would be problematic to the view of Jesus as having literally lived and died on Earth a few decades earlier, but seems to be a theme throughout the Epistles:

> 21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.[209]

> 25 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith – 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.[210]

> 24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.[211]

> 2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.[212]

> 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.[213]

The two passages from Romans seem to indicate that Christ has only “now” (the time of Paul, decades after Jesus’ life as alleged by the Gospels) been revealed, possibly by Paul himself. This seems incompatible with the view of the Gospels, which place Jesus’ life long before Paul’s first writings. Once again however, it must be noted that the Gospels are the later accounts, and could be elaborating (and changing)

Paul's story. That the Gospels are *set* in a far earlier time should not obviously count as evidence that they do contain factual information about Jesus from that time – we need to consider when the texts were written. The two passages from Colossians (whether written by Paul or another author) also seem to indicate that Christ is being revealed "now", in the time when the author is writing, rather than much earlier as portrayed in the Gospels.

The important "Christ in you" mystery of Colossians 1 also appears somewhat Gnostic (referring to a pantheistic inner divinity), and may lend some support to Doherty's theory that the Jesus of the Epistles was considered to exist (in the style of the ancient mystery religions) only in a Platonic 'lower heaven'.[214] This theory is not necessarily without precedent; second-century Church Father Irenaeus seems to hint at the existence of Christians with such unorthodox beliefs in his *Against Heresies* (1.7.2): "For they declare that all these transactions were counterparts of what took place above."[215] And if there were indeed early Christians that denied Jesus' literal and fleshy existence on Earth, *the idea of a Historical Jesus would seem incredibly implausible*. It seems that the only reason early Christians would deny Jesus would be that they were right – he didn't exist. Explaining away these extremely sceptical early Christians, who supposedly lived in a time when the eyewitnesses to Jesus were still around, becomes a monumentally daunting task for the historicist and believer.

Interestingly, while Paul never mentions when and where Jesus was on Earth, the author of Colossians takes the time to reveal the important "mystery" that Christ is "in you", which harmonises with Jesus' pantheistic assertion in the *Gospel of Thomas* (saying 3) that the kingdom of God is "inside you".[216] So instead of a quote like, 'Jesus was born and died in Palestine,' we have 'Jesus is inside you'. This is sounding less like objective history, and more like feel-good, pantheistic preaching (not that that is a bad thing – pantheism is quite positive and unifying as we shall discuss later). Doherty also mentions that Paul seems to indicate that Jesus' crucifixion was effected by the mythic and demonic *archons*, which is usually translated by more mainstream historicist scholars as "the rulers of this age", rather than by Roman authorities on Earth.[217] In other

words, again, the Epistles seem more mystical and allegorical than historical.

Doherty further points out that comments about Jesus' 'coming' in the epistles need not refer to 'the second coming'.[218] Without the knowledge of the Gospels, these references could well refer to 'the first coming'; in other words, this could actually be a hint that Jesus had not recently been on Earth! Indeed, Paul seems to think that salvation has come "now" (in Paul's day), which might astonish believers who think that that is what Jesus (and not Paul)[219] had already provided much earlier, as attested to in the Gospels.

> 2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.[220]

The latter portion of 1Corinthians 15 (v44-50) seems to further distance Paul's 'Cosmic Christ' (a saviour figure that did not exist on Earth, but in a Platonic or mystical realm) from the 'Earthly Jesus' of the Gospels. While the Gospels specify that Jesus was physically resurrected "in the flesh" (Matthew 28:9, Luke 24:42-43, John 20:24-29), Paul goes to great lengths to say that it is a *spiritual body* that is resurrected (v44), claims that the "last Adam" (Christ) was or became a life-giving spirit (v45), hints that while Adam was an earthly being, Jesus is a heavenly being (v47), then declares that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (v50). The following verse refers to a "mystery" (v51), which could allude to the mystery religions with which Christianity shares so much in common (discussed later).

Also of note is that Paul refers to other letters he had written, which are no longer extant.[221] Historians can only speculate on what these letters contained, and why later Christians may have decided to dispose of them. Had these letters made it more obvious that Paul was preaching a 'Cosmic Christ', it would not be surprising if more typical orthodox-type Christians (who believed in an earthly – and fleshly – Jesus) would censor them; a practice well within their capabilities as noted by historian Robert Wilken:

> When Christianity gained control of the Roman Empire it suppressed the writings of its critics and even cast them into flames.[222]

Tabor also recognises the historical problems that Paul's 'heavenly Christ' presents:

> Paul is all for "Christ," but cares little for Jesus as he was on earth as a human being. He minimizes those who knew Jesus and those whom Jesus personally chose to represent him. All now comes from "the Lord," but he means by this a "Christ spirit" that speaks directly to Paul, his special chosen one, with direct voice contact and information. What this means for any reconstruction of the faith of Jesus' original followers, that is, those who actually knew him, is critical. All too often it is assumed that by going to Paul, whose letters are the earliest Christian documents we have, we are getting closer to the historical Jesus – when actually quite the opposite might well be the case.[223]

The epistle of James presents similar challenges to Jesus historicists. James fails to share any of his knowledge of the historical Jesus (surprising if he is Jesus' brother, though he himself never claims this), but unlike Paul, is seemingly uninterested in the resurrection. Religious Studies scholar Matt Jackson-McCabe recognises that, to James, it are the deeds of the 'heavenly Christ' that is of importance.[224] Had the canonical Gospels pre-dated the Epistles, it could be understandable that authors such as Paul and James would focus more on the 'post-resurrection heavenly Christ' as opposed to the 'historical Jesus'; as the Epistles are the earlier documents however, the possibility that the Gospels expand on the earlier stories, and *literally* 'flesh out' the character of Jesus, cannot be ignored. Such a scenario seems more obvious when all the various sources are placed in order of composition, as scholars today best understand them.

The evolution of Jesus

It is all too easy to read the Gospels into the Pauline Epistles, especially for unsuspecting Christian believers who find the Gospels conveniently placed at the front of their Bibles. This is an uncritical, unscholarly, and biased approach in dealing with the differences in the stories between the Gospels and the Epistles. For an example of such

differences, Paul gives a completely different list of resurrection appearances than that offered by the Gospels:

> 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.[225]

Paul could be referring to the twelve Apostles of the Gospels. However, the Gospels appear later in the record. When Paul mentions "the Twelve", he offers no details; he certainly does not name them. It is possible that Cephas (Peter) is not one of "the Twelve", as the Gospels seem to think. Somehow, Paul may have also 'forgotten' that Judas had died by then (committing suicide after betraying Jesus, or so say the Gospels), so this might be more accurately described as "the Eleven" (Judas' replacement, Matthias, was appointed many weeks later according to Acts chapter 1, a later document).

Luke chapter 24 claims that Jesus did indeed appear to "the Eleven", potentially exposing the contradiction with Paul's writings. Scholars can come up with numerous apologetic explanations; but the simplest explanation is to theorise that "the Twelve" (and perhaps the "pillars of the Church") of the Epistles simply *differs* from that of the Gospels, especially when the Gospels appear later and could have expanded on and changed Paul's story. Another example of reading the Gospels into the Epistles is a reference that is often used[226] to discredit mythicists' claims of a non-literal Jesus in Paul's writings:

> 18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother.[227]

It might at first seem obvious that this is clear evidence of a historical Jesus in Paul's Epistles. If Jesus did or did not exist, his 'brother' would certainly have known about it! However, throughout the New Testament, James himself never makes any such claim that he is Jesus' biological brother. And scholars assume that James is Jesus' biological brother because of the Gospel accounts; but once again, the Gospels are post-Pauline. Reading Paul without the influence of the Gospels, it could be possible, as Doherty[228] and Price[229] theorise, that the term "Lord's

brother" is not intended to be taken literally and could refer to some sort of believer's hierarchy.

Origen of Alexandria lends support to this idea, claiming that Paul "says that he regarded this James as a brother of the Lord, not so much on account of their relationship by blood, or of their being brought up together, as because of his virtue and doctrine."[230] So too does the early Gnostic Christian document, *First Apocalypse of James*, where Jesus explicitly (24:10-16) tells James, "For not without reason have I called you my brother, although you are not my brother materially."[231] Gnostics may have other motives for claiming this however (the theological belief that the flesh is evil), though Hoffmann also alluded to the unlikelihood that Paul is referring to a literal brother of a historical Jesus:

> In the light of Paul's complete disregard for the "historical" Jesus, moreover, it is unimaginable that he would assert a biological relationship between James and "the Lord"… The James who is head of the church in Jerusalem is not a biological brother of Jesus. Later but inconsistent gospel references to James are muddled reminiscences based on the more prominent James of the Pauline tradition.[232]

Another example is provided by the so-called 'Last Supper'. It would be very easy to assume that Paul summarises this allegedly historical event, as discussed in the Gospels. But Paul's account is brief, theological, older, and admits its supposedly supernatural source.[233] In contrast, the Gospel accounts are longer, more detailed, younger, and seem to declare this a historical event.[234] It is quite possible, likely even, that the later Gospel accounts merely elaborate on an initially non-historical story. These differences between the stories of the Epistles and the stories of the Gospels cannot necessarily be harmonised, as the Gospels were written *after* the Pauline epistles.

There are clear and subtle differences between the stories which lead mythicists to suspect that the story of Jesus had evolved over time; the Gospel writers took Paul's basic story, placed Jesus in a specific time and place, and added the details.[235] An interesting pattern emerges if the various sources for Jesus are placed in order of composition (excluding Ehrman's innumerable made-up sources). First, there are the Pauline (and

perhaps other) Epistles. These are potentially followed by sayings collections, such as *Q*[236] and the *Gospel of Thomas*.[237] We then get the Gospel of Mark, the first narrative proper of Jesus of Nazareth. Mark is followed initially by the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and finally by the Gospel of John. Generally, the remaining books of the Bible appear later, as do most of the early Church writings. This is the short version; we can add many more sources that support this 'mythical to historical' trend.

Before Paul's writings, elements of Jesus' teachings, characteristics and deeds can be found in earlier mythologies, philosophies and religions (such as the dying/rising saviour motif,[238] the teachings of the Buddha, [239] Philo's *Logos* figure, and as discussed earlier, the Jewish Old Testament), which is explored further in a later chapter. In Paul's writings, readers are introduced to the figure of Jesus, who is not placed in a specific time and place, and who could possibly be an allegorical figure, or one active in a realm 'above the Earth'. Paul's writings echo some of Jesus' teachings, though they are not attributed to him. *Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas* possibly follow Paul as precursors to the canonical Gospels, and begin to ascribe many of Paul's teachings to Jesus. The Gospel of Mark then appears, with a proper narrative (though only of the latter portion of Jesus' life), and many more deeds and sayings attributed to Jesus – perhaps partly motivated by the wish for a literal saviour around the time of Jerusalem's destruction by the armies of Titus.

Matthew and Luke flesh out the story even further, introducing fuller and strangely contradictory accounts of Jesus' miraculous birth, and the later Gospel of John reminds readers (from the very first verse) that Jesus "was God."[240] The Church Fathers then argue over various interpretations of Jesus' teachings, deeds, or even his form of existence, followed centuries later by modern scholars who basically do the same... Modern, secular scholarship however, seems content to strip away the supernatural elements, leaving a somewhat mundane and insignificant Jesus.[241] Such historicist scholars are then followed by Jesus mythicists who insist that even the more natural elements of the story can be stripped away until there is virtually nothing left.[242]

These JMT proponents promote a non-historical view of Jesus, arguably as Paul and/or other early Christians had already done, potentially bringing Jesus' evolution full-circle. Had there been a historical Jesus, Paul's writings may be expected to portray him differently (with reliable and trustworthy sources named), and perhaps there would have been fewer disagreements in the early days of the Church, and the historical Jesus scholarship of modern times. These issues with the Epistles greatly affect the likelihood of the Biblical Jesus' existence, and make the idea that even a Historical Jesus didn't exist more plausible.

Fictitious founders

That a movement could revolve around a mystical, fictitious or legendary figure that was later historicised is not without precedent: such theories exist on King Arthur, who has been likened to the Gaelic Fionn – originally a mythical god, later historicised – and of whom historians cannot assume historicity "simply because a medieval source claims that this is the case".[243] And of course, Christians would generally be happy to acknowledge that this may have happened with rival religions… Historian of Religion Arthur Droge asserts: "To start a religion, all you need is a *name*."[244] To further his point, Droge refers to a brilliant quote by the formerly outspoken anti-theist, Christopher Hitchens:

> Yet again it is demonstrated that monotheistic religion is a plagiarism of a plagiarism of a hearsay of a hearsay, of an illusion of an illusion, extending all the way back to a fabrication of a few non-events.[245]

Droge argues that religions need not have an 'originating moment' and that the historical movement of Luddism "was not generated by the dramatic actions of any one individual", but by the creation and appropriation of a name, a figure, an eponym: in this case, the "perhaps apocryphal" (i.e. non-existing) Ned Ludd. Droge explores the varying groups (by geographical region and by labour sector) of the technophobic Luddites, who each sought to adapt the figure of Ned Ludd to suit their

needs. Sound familiar? Droge speculates if such “polygenesis” (many origins) could also apply to the origins of Christianity.

Like the early Christians, the Luddites produced poems, manifestoes, and anonymous writings. He then points to modern ‘neo-Luddites’ who engage in “mythmaking, in the construction of genealogies and the invention of histories”, drawing parallels with modern historical Jesus scholars who impose their own views on their version of the ‘Historical Jesus’ and who “are not *really* talking about Jesus at all”. Droge finally calls for scholars to acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was “probably apocryphal”, and to focus their attention on “matters much more interesting and important when it comes to the invention of Christianity.”[246]

The Docetic Jesus

It is possible that early Christians (such as Paul) did not see Jesus in the literal, fleshly, Earth-visiting way that modern, orthodox Christians do. Recent studies in the origins of early Christianity are revealing that the very early days of the Christian faith were plagued with schism; there were many and varied types of Christianity,[247] with radically divergent views on doctrine, and even on the nature of Jesus. One ancient group that had very different ideas of Jesus (which could open the door for even more ‘non-historical’ views as theorised by Price, Doherty and popular, esoteric authors such as Freke, Gandy and Acharya S) was the Docetists.[248]

Much like Gnosticism, Docetism is a term that can be used for more groups and ideas than is intended. Of interest to this research project are the Docetists who essentially denied the reality of Jesus Christ’s suffering (and his ultimate sacrifice), and thus became labelled as heretical by proto-orthodox Christians (precursors to the Roman Catholic Christians). [249] To these Docetists, Jesus Christ was not human; he was a spirit, completely divine.[250] This Jesus then only *appeared* to be human, much like a phantom. Bart Ehrman notes that there are instances in the New Testament where a docetic-type of Jesus may be hinted at,[251] particularly among the writings of… Paul. Big surprise.

> 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.[252]

The passage may indicate that Jesus came not in “sinful flesh”, but only in the “likeness of sinful flesh”. 1John also seems to counter those that do not believe in a literal, fleshly Jesus, essentially proving that such Christians existed.[253] A Jesus that is not ‘fleshly’ is a Jesus closer to being entirely fictional. Traces of Docetism found in the New Testament could indicate that Docetism and Christian Gnosticism may be older than traditionally thought; and contrary to popular views, potentially older than the more orthodox forms of Christianity. Ehrman goes on to mention that important early Christians like Origen and Clement of Alexandria also demonstrated hints of Gnostic and docetic thought.[254] Clement even went so far as to say that, “the Gnostic alone is holy and pious”.[255]

Religious Historian Elaine Pagels acknowledged early unorthodox views of Jesus, alluding to groups where “each person recognizes the Lord in his own way”.[256] Quite a difference from the matter-of-fact teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and other conservative denominations! Ehrman also claimed that proto-orthodox Christian “scribes ‘corrupted’ their texts for theological reasons”, and that they tampered with Galatians 4:4 in order to combat Docetism.[257] This verse is highly significant to the debate over Jesus’ historicity, as it is a rare passage among Paul’s writings indicating that Jesus may have had a fleshly body:

> 4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*, Father.” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.[258]

That early Christians could consider the possibility that Jesus had not literally come to Earth as a human being is remarkable in itself (given that they lived during or soon after Jesus’ alleged time on Earth, and should have had access to still-living eyewitnesses), but also allows for the possibility of even more sceptical and heretical views; such as that Jesus

only appeared in a Platonic realm, that he resides inside all people, or that Jesus did not actually appear anywhere, in any form. If the argument can be made that the Gospel story of Jesus is meant to be taken as completely allegorical or symbolic, and it can, the same can definitely be said about the Docetic Jesus, and the 'visionary Christ' of Paul's writings.

If in the earliest Christian writings, Jesus is portrayed as a figure who resided not on Earth, but in another realm, or who may be entirely spiritual, and who communicates with his followers via visions and spiritual appearances, secular Bible scholars should seriously consider viewing Jesus with the same scepticism they accord to 'spiritual' Gospel characters, such as Gabriel and Satan.

Concluding remarks

Had there been an earthly and historical Jesus, Paul's writings might be expected to portray him in a more historical manner (with reliable and trustworthy sources named), and there certainly would have been fewer disagreements – and less violence – among ancient and modern Christians. It is noteworthy that there did exist early Christians who held alternative views on Jesus' fleshly existence. There are also numerous passages within the Pauline Epistles that portray a Jesus that is very different from the Gospels' image. A Jesus is depicted, who need not necessarily have been on Earth, at a certain point in our history.

The example of the Luddites also demonstrates how a movement/s and writings can spring forth from (or be retrospectively associated with) a character that scholars have no good reason to assume existed historically, and how a movement can have many 'origins'. It is therefore not necessary that there was a historical Jesus behind the beginnings of Christianity; and the writings of early Christians, as well as the clear evolution of the story among the available texts, give us ample reason to doubt that there was a historical Jesus at all. As Droge noted, "To start a religion, all you need is a *name*."

Chapter 4: Jesus' similarities to earlier characters

One of the major reasons to doubt the Bible's portrayal of Jesus is that many aspects of Jesus and his life story echo fictional tropes. They are similar to that of other stories and characters. These characters might be historical or mythical, human or supernatural, contemporary or much older. That there may be shared motifs between the central figure of Christianity and 'pagan' characters is today an unpopular theory among both conservative[259] and secular Biblical scholars.[260] It is unpopular, probably because it is undeniable, and is damning to the case of the Biblical Jesus (and to a lesser extent, the case of a Historical Jesus).

These scholarly disagreements can cause confusion as there are quite a few who do acknowledge the obvious parallelism,[261] and important and influential early Christians not only admitted to these parallels, [262] but attempted to convert pagans to Christianity by making reference to such parallels, and also assumed that demonic forces keen on confusing believers were responsible for them (known as diabolical mimicry).[263] The ridiculous theory goes: Satan outsmarted God, discovered his plans for Jesus, and created his numerous 'false religions' before God's true religion would emerge, which resulted in countless people being unnecessarily deceived and condemned to Hell. And God, despite being all-powerful and all-good, just stood by and let it happen. Nice. Like I said, ridiculous.

Of course, that large parts of the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus might be influenced by other religions and philosophies, would not necessarily rule out the possibility that there still was a historical core behind the mythical embellishments, but it is surely enough to discredit Christianity as we know it. This chapter argues that there are clear, early pagan parallels with the Jesus story, and that these parallels allow for significant doubt over the sources used to establish Jesus' historicity. Of particular importance are early parallels of Jesus' resurrection account. If resurrection accounts tend to be 'false', then a statistical (Bayesian) analysis of Jesus' resurrection

account would generally also be expected to conclude that it is false – more on this later.

Parallels with contemporary figures

There are a number of contemporaries and near-contemporaries of Jesus, whose teachings, deeds or life events could have influenced (or been influenced by) the stories of Jesus of Nazareth. According to Josephus, there were a number of healers, prophets, religious authorities and messiah-type figures alive during the first century, such as Eleazar the exorcist, John the Baptist, Onias the rain-maker, and Menahem the warrior-king.[264] Some of these figures were actually named "Jesus", such as Jesus ben Damneus (of the aforementioned Josephan passage on 'James the brother of Jesus') and Jesus ben Ananias.[265]

Philostratus' third century account of Apollonius of Tyana is reminiscent of Jesus' story as portrayed in the Gospels (such as his miraculous healings),[266] as acknowledged by ardent Jesus historicists such as Ehrman.[267] Amateurish claims have also been made of parallels between Mithraism and Christianity,[268] though many of these are attested to by sources that seem to post-date the New Testament.[269] The dates of the sources, as well as the figures being contemporaneous do not necessarily allow for a convincing argument that Jesus' story was influenced by them. Nor is it particularly surprising if there are parallels between early Christianity and various Jewish traditions, given that Christianity stems from Judaism (though these parallels allow for other important arguments as discussed earlier). Stronger claims of Christianity's possible influences are made by referring to sources that are earlier, and pagan.

Parallels with earlier figures

Religious Historian Petra Pakkanen has isolated four major trends in Hellenistic religion, in the centuries leading up to the beginning of Christianity, common among mystery religions (mysterious and

allegorical cults): syncretism (the merging of ideas), monotheism (or progression towards the idea of one true god, via henotheism), individualism and cosmopolitanism.[270] These trends (particularly syncretism) are found among various mystery religions, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries (containing Hellenistic and Phoenician elements), Mithraism (containing Hellenistic and Persian elements), and the Mysteries of Isis and Osiris (containing Hellenistic and Egyptian elements).[271]

Richard Carrier then argues that Christianity conforms to all four trends, and that combining Hellenistic elements with Judaism would yield a religion much like Christianity,[272] and perhaps a saviour figure much like Philo's *Logos* (explored in the next section). One example of Christianity's syncretism, particularly in the context of incorporating previous traditions' gods and key figures (in order to facilitate easier conversion, and to eliminate rivals) is the incorporation of John the Baptist (a saviour/prophet-type figure in his own right) into the Gospel story.[273] Syncretism is actually very common among religions, that tend to be influenced by previous religions, and Christianity is no exception.

Carrier then points to other elements in common between Christianity and various mystery religions, such as the saviour god and the dying-and-rising god (i.e. resurrecting), [274] referring to Romulus (whose death and resurrection was celebrated in annual passion plays), Zalmoxis (whose death and resurrection allowed eternal life for followers) and Osiris (whose death and resurrection allowed for salvation, via baptism) as the best examples.[275] Like Jesus, Osiris' death is also associated with the full moon (John 19:14 compared with Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris* 42), and tradition holds that he returned on 'the third day' (Luke 24:7 cf. *Isis and Osiris* 39,42).[276] Interestingly, the well-known (to the Jews) pagan god Baal also died (being devoured by Mot) and triumphantly returned.[277]

That such parallels are not necessarily overtly obvious or identical – a common charge by religious apologists – does not diminish the similarities or possible influences. If features between different religions were identical, it would no longer be emulation; it would simply be the same religion or story! Scholars would expect adaptations partly caused by

differing cultural norms in the forming of the new religion. We wouldn't expect them to be exactly the same, otherwise they would be the same religion. That such non-existent figures were often saviour gods, sons (or daughters) of a god, suffered for mankind, and inspired stories of themselves set on Earth (while originally being 'celestial beings', until the process of euhemerisation – later being 'historicised'), may reasonably give cause to doubt the very existence of Jesus, whose most complete early sources portray him in a similar manner.

There are also parallels with other figures who may have been historical or ahistorical, many of which appear earlier than those from the Hellenistic period. Jesus was not the only ancient figure to arrive on Earth miraculously (Matthew 1:18); the Buddha was said to have appeared out of his virgin mother's side,[278] and the mother of Perseus was impregnated by a god (Zeus), by way of a golden shower.[279] Kinky. While Jesus preached the so-called 'golden rule' (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31), so too did the Buddha[280] and Confucius.[281] While Jesus was supposedly interrogated by Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:2) over his supposedly arrogant claims, Dionysus (another dying-and-rising god) allegedly appeared before King Pentheus on charges of claiming divinity.[282] While Jesus first appears in the Gospels as a wise man (with no childhood or adolescence in Mark 1:1-9), Laozi also was said to have first appeared as a wise and mature man, ready to teach us unenlightened ones.[283] And like Jesus (Matthew 5:43-47), Laozi also encouraged the loving of enemies, only many centuries earlier.[284]

While Jesus was tempted by Satan (Luke chapter 4), the Buddha was tempted by Mara[285] and Zoroaster by Ahriman.[286] While Jesus could miraculously produce wine (John 2:1-11), so too could Dionysis.[287] While Jesus was said to have walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33), so too is walking on water associated with the Buddha.[288] Jesus' death and empty tomb story (John 20:1-10) shares similarities with the mystery over the deceased Hercules' bones,[289] and also of Romulus, whose disappearance was associated with an unusual darkness (cf. Mark 15:33), and would eventually result in triumph.[290] And while many religious traditions incorporate some element of astro-theology via sun-worship, Church father Tertullian responds to the allegation that the sun is the god

of Christianity not with denial (*Ad Nationes* 1.13), but with a surprising and perhaps immature admission and defence: “What then? Do you do less than this?”[291] Robert Price noted similarities between the story of Jesus and the “Mythic Hero Archetype” delineated earlier by independent scholar FitzRoy Richard Somerset (the fourth Baron Raglan) and psychologist Otto Rank:[292]

> In broad outline and in detail, the life of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels corresponds to the worldwide Mythic Hero Archetype in which a divine hero’s birth is supernaturally predicted and conceived, the infant hero escapes attempts to kill him, demonstrates his precocious wisdom already as a child, receives a divine commission, defeats demons, wins acclaim, is hailed as king, then betrayed, losing popular favor, executed, often on a hilltop, and is vindicated and taken up to heaven.[293]

The identification of such parallels is certainly not limited to the über-sceptical mythicists, with the more mainstream Biblical scholar Robert Funk recognising that Paul “identified Jesus as a savior figure of the Hellenistic type, a dying/rising god, such as Osiris in the Isis cult” and noticing that “It was not the life and teachings of Jesus but the death of Jesus and his appearance to Paul in a vision… that became the focal points of Paul’s gospel”.[294] Other scholars acknowledging the similarities of Christianity and mystery religions include second century Christian Church Father Clement of Alexandria and Professor of Bible and Christian Studies Marvin W Meyer.[295] Hoffman also indicated that the knowledge of such parallels is “not new to scholarship” and that there are many similar myths and stories of earlier figures, who often were “dying, rising, saving”.[296] In a recent article, Biblical scholar Philip Davies theorises that a recognition that Jesus’ historicity is not certain would “nudge Jesus scholarship towards academic respectability”, finds attempts at discovering the ‘Historical Jesus’ to be “poor history”, and confirms the alleged mythic parallels:

> Two articles in *Is This Not the Carpenter?* (by the two editors, in fact) amass a great deal of evidence that the profile of Jesus in the New Testament is composed of stock motifs drawn from all over the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world. These parallels are valid: in trying to provide an account of who and what Jesus was such resources were inevitably drawn upon, consciously or unconsciously by the gospel writers.[297]

Philo's pre-Christian and pre-Pauline 'Celestial Jesus'

This is big.

The possibility that Paul's Jesus is a 'celestial Christ', who appeared in visions, and may have existed in outer space rather than on Earth, was considered earlier, and is a popular argument from some mythicists (and even accepted by several Jesus historicists).[298] Interestingly, Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20BCE-50CE), a supposed contemporary of Jesus, whose writings predate those of Paul, and the Gospels, makes no mention of Jesus of Nazareth or his followers, but *does* refer to a celestial figure, a purely supernatural figure, called the *Logos* (cf. John1:1).[299] *The big issue is that this purely supernatural figure, sounds very much like Jesus Christ.* Richard Carrier brought it to my attention that this *Logos* figure is variously described by Philo as the 'firstborn son of God' (cf. Romans 8:29),[300] the celestial "image of God" (cf. 2Corinthians 4:4),[301] God's agent of creation (cf. 1Corinthians 8:6)[302] and God's high priest (cf. Colossians 1:18, Hebrews 4:14).[303]

Dr Carrier further highlights Philo's insistence that believers should emulate this *Logos* figure (cf. Galatians 3:27, 1Corinthians 11:1).[304] Philo also describes the *Logos* as the expiator of sins and mediator for mankind (cf. Colossians 1:13-14).[305] If Philo's Messiah-like *Logos* and Paul's (and other epistle authors') Christ are unrelated, it is a great coincidence. Given the timeframes, it seems obvious that Paul adapted Philo's *Logos* figure into his own concept of Jesus Christ. An equally impressive 'coincidence' would be that in discussing this seemingly nameless figure, Philo refers to an Old Testament passage, which provides the one thing Droge said is necessary to start a religion: a *name*. You can probably see where this is going… In the Septuagint[306] (an old version of the Old Testament, possibly more reliable than the oft-used Masoretic version), this figure is given the name, "Jesus", as explained by Carrier:

> Nor was the idea of a pre-existent spiritual son of God a novel idea among the Jews anyway. Paul's contemporary, Philo, interprets the messianic prophecy of Zechariah 6:11-12 in just such a way. In the Septuagint this says to place the crown of kingship upon "Jesus," for "So says Jehovah the Ruler of All, 'Behold the man named 'Rises', and he shall rise up from his place below and he shall build the House of the Lord'." This pretty much is the Christian Gospel.[307]

Whether this 'a crown for Jesus' passage in Zechariah is meant to foreshadow the future Jesus Christ or not (as Christians might like to think), what matters is how Philo interprets this passage, and how he goes on to influence Paul, and ultimately, the Gospel authors. This passage from Zechariah was commented on by Philo, who links it with his supernatural and divine *Logos* figure, in *On the Confusion of Tongues 62-63*:

> "Behold, the man named Rises!" is a very novel appellation indeed, if you consider it as spoken of a man who is compounded of body and soul. But if you look upon it as applied to that incorporeal being who in no respect differs from the divine image, you will then agree that the name of 'Rises' has been given to him with great felicity. For the Father of the Universe has caused him to rise up as the eldest son, whom, in another passage, he calls the firstborn. And he who is thus born, imitates the ways of his father…[308]

Carrier further notes that Zechariah's 'Jesus' shall "rule" (Zechariah 6:13). That Philo discusses a pre-Christian (and Jewish), pre-Pauline celestial 'Jesus' who was not a literal and historical human being, and who shares many characteristics with Paul's alleged 'cosmic Christ' and the Gospels' 'earthly Jesus', is of great importance to the case made by Jesus mythicists and should surely be an area of further research. There are important implications on the origins of the Jesus story, but also of early Christianity and Christian Gnosticism, such as providing a possible explanation of how Platonic (Plato being a hugely influential ancient Greek philosopher) thought could have influenced Christianity far earlier than initially imagined.

Religious Studies scholars Joe Barnhart and Linda Kraeger also allude to Paul's Platonic influence, via Philo, and perhaps other Jewish and Roman sources.[309] Philo's *Logos*/Jesus also neatly fits into the evolution of the Jesus story proposed in the previous chapter, as it was influenced by the Old Testament (including the 'Jesus to be crowned') and likely influenced the 'visionary Christ' of the Pauline Epistles. In such a scenario, Philo promotes an other-worldly, and spiritual *Logos*, which

would evolve into Paul's other-worldly but fleshly Christ, culminating in the Gospels' portrayal of an earthly and fleshly, 'Historical Jesus'.

Now why are the incredibly significant **facts** that Jesus' contemporary Philo fails to make any mention of Jesus Christ (or a 'Historical Jesus'), but instead makes much mention of a Jesus-like heavenly-figure, also referred to as Jesus, not a part of mainstream knowledge? That this indicates entirely mythical origins for Jesus should at least be openly discussed, if not seen as all that likely. That Churches would suppress such information is understandable, though obviously not ideal. That academic institutions would do the same, I think, makes it very clear that there are real problems within academia, particularly with the scholarly study of religion.[310]

Concluding remarks

Despite the denials by Christian apologists in particular, there are clear, and early, pagan parallels with many important teachings and deeds that are attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. Crucially, Philo's *Logos* provides a blueprint of sorts for Paul's 'heavenly Christ', pointing to a mystical-to-historical evolution in the stories about Jesus. While parallels with earlier pagan sources do not rule out that a historical Jesus did exist behind the mythical embellishments, they do have implications on the trustworthiness and accuracy of the sources (such as the New Testament Gospels and Epistles) and give reason to suspect that not all of them were intended to be taken as literal or are genuinely historical, doing considerable damage to the 'Biblical Jesus' in the process.

The principle of analogy is useful here too, as is the methodology of philosopher Stephen Law, not only in dismissing supernatural claims, but also in showing scepticism towards more mundane claims and questioning sources that are analogous to earlier and fabricated mythical sources. The more early pagan parallels with mythical characters and other potential influences for the Jesus story are found, the less reason there is for historians to assume that the Gospels contain accurate historical information, and this further reduces the 'need' for a Historical Jesus.

When it is acknowledged that a supernatural Jesus is virtually impossible, but still asserted that a purely human Jesus may have existed, we can reconsider the latter point when all the earliest references to him happen to portray him in ways that can be explained by Hellenistic-type syncretism, sharing mythical elements with fictional dying/rising saviour gods.

Conclusion to Part I

As we have seen, based on the sources, there is little reason to accept the Biblical claims about Jesus as being true. Furthermore, while the 'Christ of Faith' is generally dismissed by secular scholars (the principle of analogy alone justifies this), and the 'Historical Jesus' offered up as a more rational alternative, we have seen how even the latter can be seriously questioned, itself being merely a distilled version of the 'Christ of Faith', and sharing the same dodgy sources. The methods of historians were briefly mentioned, and compared to the methods of Biblical scholars searching for authentic material on the Historical Jesus.

It was discovered that the 'criteria of authenticity' used in Historical Jesus studies are in themselves inappropriate, or used in an inappropriate manner. The inconsistency of historicist scholars, and their perceived lack of scepticism, was also briefly mentioned. The sources that are most often used in Jesus research were summarised, collected, and scrutinised. A major finding of this research project was that none of the sources were beyond scrutiny; each one presented a variety of problems that raise serious questions over their accuracy and reliability.

The major aim of this research project was to determine if it is rational to doubt the Biblical Jesus that many Christians insist we should accept as our Lord and Saviour. The conclusion is, "yes, we have plenty of reason to be doubtful over the Biblical Jesus". Moving at times to a far less relevant issue, it was even determined that as the sources are so bad, it is entirely rational to doubt the existence even of a stripped-down, insignificant, non-miraculous Historical Jesus. We discovered that there is a complete lack of primary source evidence (evidence that is contemporary to the event and created by direct eyewitnesses); [311] itself sufficient reason to have doubts over the existing sources, and an argument that is inadequately handled by Jesus historicists.

Numerous problems were then identified with the sources that scholars do have access to, such as being relatively late, being hearsay, the

likelihood of pious fraud, and ambiguity. Some of the sources used to support Jesus' historicity even fail to mention his name. The genre of the canonical Gospels, the main sources of evidence for Jesus, was found to be an issue that has still not been resolved by historians and Biblical scholars, though it is obvious that they are not objective and reliable historical accounts. Given that the Gospels were written by anonymous authors and contain much legendary and unhistorical material, the reliability and historical intent of the Gospels can easily be dismissed.

We also discussed the important and increasingly-accepted theory that the Jesus of the Pauline (and other) Epistles differs greatly from the Jesus portrayed in the Canonical Gospels. Paul's spurious sources were identified (distilled essentially to his imagination), as was his minimalistic and generally unquotable Jesus. Found among Paul's (and others') letters, were passages that could indicate a Jesus who had not been on Earth in recent history. When the sources for Jesus were placed in order of composition, the overarching pattern was that of a simple story (potentially having 'pre-Jesus' origins) of a purely other-worldly being, evolving (being historicised) and becoming more elaborate over time, though eventually culminating in very sceptical views on Jesus in the modern age.

With Paul's very different and minimalistic Christ appearing before the Jesus of the Gospels being a serious problem for historicist scholars, a solution was provided by noted New Testament scholars such as Bart Ehrman: the invention of numerous pre-Pauline Gospel sources. [312] Such an approach was found to be inadequate, uncritical, and inconsistent, especially when considering that Ehrman derides such an approach when applied to other sources. In briefly discussing the Docetists, a precedent was set that allows for the possibility of early Christians who did not believe in a Jesus that was human, or had recently visited Earth. Historical examples were also considered of movements that did not require a single, historical founder.

That the Jesus story as found in the New Testament could have borrowed from and been influenced by contemporary and earlier saviour/teacher figures (divine and mundane, mythological and historical),

was mentioned. While sometimes resisted by Jesus historicists, particularly Christian apologists, it is clear that such parallels are evident. Specific similarities may not be obvious, but similar motifs are definitely present; a fact admitted to by early Christian apologists, such as Tertullian and Justin Martyr. These similarities give further reason to doubt not only the Biblical Jesus, but the so-called Historical Jesus as well.

The brief discussion on Bayes' Theorem's use in historical studies further highlighted the inadequacy and deficiencies of the authenticity criteria (or rather, their use by Biblical scholars), revealing that Biblical scholarship on Jesus is quite a mess. Bayes' Theorem was praised as a useful tool in historical methodology, and its application to the issue of Jesus' historicity and the existence of supernatural figures leads to potentially ground-breaking sceptical conclusions which shall be explored further in the interlude. While such conclusions can be arrived at by other means, utilising Bayes' Theorem demonstrates that what may have previously been claimed intuitively or expressed through informal logic, can now be stated mathematically; a topic worthy of further research.

An interesting trend that popped up was that many components of various Jesus Myth Theories, such as the lack of primary sources, the general unreliability of the Gospels, the minimalistic Jesus of the Epistles, and parallels with earlier mythical figures, are agreed upon by both mythicists and Jesus historicists. It is in the over-arching conclusions where they differ, with JMT proponents perhaps having the courage to put their credibility on the line in 'connecting the dots'. Of course, the JMT is ultimately irrelevant (though not completely), as it is the Biblical Jesus that Christians believe in, and secularists do not; but it is an interesting – and plausible – concept in its own right.

Much time was spent critiquing Bart Ehrman's recent book, *Did Jesus Exist?* Of course, we agree when it comes to the Biblical Jesus (that he cannot be proven historically), but Ehrman's insistence on the existence of the Historical Jesus exposed his inconsistency; his privileging of the texts that he quite easily dismisses when it is the supernatural claims that are being discussed. A number of issues with Ehrman's approach were identified, such as: his unnecessary attacking of mythicists' credentials,

his use of imaginary sources (of which he claims there are “enormous” amounts), [313] his unjustified and surprising conclusions (such as stating that Tacitus’ account relies on hearsay, while later claiming that the Tacitean passage provides independent attestation and proves that early Romans knew there was a historical Jesus), his privileging of the Gospels, which he admits are unreliable, and his inconsistent approach. [314]

His instant dismissal of various Jesus Myth Theories as “irrelevant”, combined with his underwhelming positive case, arguably only demonstrates the *possibility* (as opposed to the likelihood or even certainty that Ehrman asserts) of Jesus’ historical existence. It was decided that there was no need to further critique Ehrman’s disappointing work, especially as in the meantime, historian Richard Carrier had released this scathing review:

> As bad as those kinds of self contradictions and fallacies are (and there are more than just that one), far worse is how Ehrman moves from the possibility of hypothetical sources to the conclusion of having proved historicity. He argues that because Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Thomas (yes, Thomas) and various other documents all have material the others don’t, that therefore we “have” a zillion earlier sources... We don’t in fact have those sources, we aren’t even sure they exist, and even if we were, we have no way of knowing what they said… Ehrman repeatedly cites false stories, even stories he himself confesses to be false (indeed, even false stories in forged documents!) as evidence for the existence of Jesus, which is the most unbelievably illogical thing I could imagine any historian doing… I have no choice but to condemn this thing as being nothing more than a sad murder of electrons and trees.[315]

Carrier speaks with the sort of honesty and wit an independent scholar can afford, and goes on to criticise Ehrman’s use of Aramaicisms:

> But notice what happens when we take it into account: Mark dressed up a scene by borrowing and translating a line from the Bible, and Ehrman wants us to believe this is evidence for the historicity of Jesus. Really. Think about that for a moment. Then kick his book across the room to vent your outrage... How does a story being fabricated in Aramaic prove the characters in that story existed?[316]

Carrier further criticises Ehrman’s over-reliance on emic (insider) accounts, his deceitful way of framing mythicists’ theories as improbable, and mentions that, “Biographies were also written of non-existent people (like Romulus, Numa, Coriolanus, Hercules, and Aesop).”[317] Like the Apostle Paul, Ehrman constantly relies on his imaginary sources, which is

obviously not how competent and objective historians go about their work. Despite Ehrman's failings, and this very blunt review,[318] Ehrman deserves credit for rightly dismissing the Biblical Jesus, and at least making the attempt to prove Jesus' historicity, when it is normally just assumed in Biblical scholarship, and perhaps for inadvertently increasing awareness of the mythicist theory. Ehrman would have been of greater service to the scholarly community however, had he made an honest attempt.

Now until some convincing piece of evidence about a Biblical, historical or purely mythical Jesus (or the beliefs of the earliest Christians) is found in future, it seems that the most rational position on Jesus would be a complete rejection of the 'Christ of Faith' or 'Biblical Jesus', and holding to an agnostic-type position on a more mundane, 'Historical Jesus'. Maybe there was such a Jesus, maybe there was not. In the absence of convincing evidence, it is possible, but not necessarily probable, and certainly not certain. As Price noted earlier, even if there was a Historical Jesus, there is essentially nothing we can about him with certainty. Many apologists fallaciously argue that Jesus Christ is necessary to explain the rise of Christianity.

Actually, considering the lack of primary sources, the late and questionable secondary sources, and the existence of early Christians who believed in more 'mystical' versions of Jesus, as well as the rise of many other religions that the Christian finds 'obviously wrong', it is obvious that the one thing we ***don't need*** to explain the rise of Christianity is a historical Jesus Christ. There are far-reaching implications with the possibility that Jesus was an entirely ahistorical figure, largely revolving around the claims made by the various Christian religions. If it could be proven (which it cannot) that the 'Historical Jesus' did not exist, the 'Christ of Faith' could be dismissed instantly, presumably along with traditional forms of Christianity.[319]

For those Christians whose beliefs rely on the factual *certainty* of Jesus' historicity, which is fair enough given the stakes, the conclusion that Jesus' historicity is actually uncertain could have great ramifications on their faith. That Jesus' very existence is uncertain would also be

information helpful to those scholars intending to combat religious fundamentalism (such as Richard Dawkins and Hector Avalos).[320] If we can't even be sure that a mundane, non-miraculous Historical Jesus existed, how can we possibly be certain that the far less plausible Biblical Jesus must have existed? A highly positive implication of this discovered uncertainty could be that the focus of studies on Jesus moves from unnecessarily and unsuccessfully 'authenticating' various sayings and deeds to the intended messages of the teachings (many of which I hold dear to my heart), whether they stem from a historical Jesus or not.[321]

Interlude: Mathematics demonstrates the implausibility of Jesus & God

Part I dealt with the Christ of Faith, and to a lesser extent, the Historical Jesus. Part II will deal with God, with a heavy focus on the Judeo-Christian God, Yahweh. In this little interlude, we shall explore further the aforementioned Bayesian reasoning, consider how useful it is in our scholarly and everyday pursuits, and learn how it justifies sceptical thinking. I shall mathematically prove the popular atheistic mantra, 'extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence'. [322] Mathematics is not the most popular subject amongst scholars of the Humanities or lay people, so I shall keep this as simple and brief as possible. Actually, we'll hardly be doing any precise calculations. Hopefully, I'll be able to show you not only that mathematics is vitally important (beyond the obvious scientific and engineering applications), but that it can be, in a non-nerdy way, fun!

The use of Bayes' Theorem demonstrates that a 'smoking gun', such as a letter from Peter describing how Jesus was completely fabricated or that the Gospels are great exaggerations of the real deal is not necessary in order to reveal that the Biblical Jesus' existence is unlikely (just as it has not been necessary in order for scholars to be doubtful over the claims made of Moses and Abraham in the Old Testament – including their very existence).[323] Bayes' Theorem also side-steps any sort of 'prove the negative' argument, preventing supporters of a supernatural theory from claiming their 'possible' views as 'probable'. Bayes' Theorem allows the historian to objectively compare various theories, and helps decide which is more probable. As Bayes' Theorem forces the historian to consider how alternative theories also fit the evidence, it avoids the effects of confirmation bias, which is what many Biblical scholars are guilty of (and which opposes the much-trusted scientific method). Here is the long form of Bayes' Theorem as applicable to historical methodology, as well as Carrier's natural language version:[324]

$$P(h \mid e.b) = \frac{P(h \mid b) \times P(e \mid h.b)}{[P(h \mid b) \times P(e \mid h.b)] + [P(\tilde{}h \mid b) \times P(e \mid \tilde{}h.b)]}$$

P = probability, *h* = hypothesis, *e* = evidence, *b* = background knowledge.

Which represents the logic:

"given all we know so far, then…"

$$\text{The probability our explanation is true} = \frac{\text{How typical our explanation is} \times \text{How expected the evidence is if our explanation is true}}{\{\text{repeat the above}\} + \{\text{How atypical our explanation is} \times \text{How expected the evidence is if our explanation isn't true}\}}$$

There are four critical elements that make Bayesian methodology so useful, and as objective as historical reasoning can be. Firstly, there is the hypothesis, or explanation, in question. By definition, all who seek to advance a particular hypothesis (i.e. fundamentalist Christians or conspiracy theorists) have a hypothesis they believe in or wish to argue for. Secondly, there is the evidence for the hypothesis, which I call 'current evidence' or 'revealed evidence'. All but the most incompetent of amateur internet historians will see the need to back up their theory with some sort of evidence, even if it's no good. So far, all scholars, and the vast majority of people who think themselves scholars, will agree with these two uncontroversial elements. What makes Bayesian methodology so rational is the remaining two elements.

The third element has to do with what Bayesians call 'prior probability'. This is inferred by *all* the background evidence or knowledge. What makes this important is that theorists can't just select the evidence (the second element described above) that supports their particular theory. Bayes' Theorem forces them to consider *all* the evidence. For example, it is not right to only consider a handful of texts that claim that a particular person rose from the dead. We must *also* consider the multitude of texts that claim that that particular person did not rise from the dead, as well as all the historical (and obviously false) claims of people rising from the dead, and our biological knowledge of it being pretty much impossible that people rise from the dead.

The fourth and final element is as important as the third, perhaps more so. The evidence must not only be compared to the particular hypothesis or theory in question (the first element), but with *all* possible explanations. For example, the historian might claim that the evidence fits perfectly with claim A, so claim A must be true. Another historian interjects, puts forth claim B, compares the evidence with claims A and B (and all other possible claims), and finally makes a rational decision as to which claim is most probable. Which do you think is more of a logical historian, and which is more like an internet conspiracy theorist?

None of this is foreign to the competent historian. This is what they do. Though they might not see their methods as particularly mathematical, and some (like most of us) may not even have heard of Bayes' Theorem, they are nevertheless in alignment with Bayesian principles. It is a shame that many scholars do not use such iron-clad methodology. Case in point: Biblical historians. The worst-kept secret in the academic world is that the majority of Biblical scholars (as well as Philosophers of Religion) are Christians who believe in the Christian God and in the Biblical Jesus. In light of this brief discussion of Bayesian principles, it is obvious that many Biblical scholars (at least those that defend the miraculous claims of the Bible) are not properly considering how alternative hypotheses and the ignored evidence affect their theories. The proof of this is the previously mentioned embarrassment of the many differing theories that Biblical historians have over issues such as which miracles actually happened, who Jesus really was, and even if Jesus existed at all.

What makes Bayes' Theorem, and the more easily digestible Bayesian *reasoning*, so important is that theorists are forced to be more transparent with their claims, by assigning, or even just alluding to, quantitative or numerical values. When employing Bayes' Theorem, the historian will no longer be allowed to pass off a merely possible theory as one that is probable, or almost certain; the numbers cannot lie. But what if numbers cannot be produced? This is no big problem as there are several alternatives. For one, qualitative judgments can be assigned a number, through rough approximation. For example, 'even odds' means 50%,

‘improbable’ might mean 20%, ‘very probable’ could mean 95%, while ‘more than likely’ would mean greater than 50%.

And when prior probabilities simply cannot be produced, there is always the option of a modified version of Bayes’ Rule (the odds form of Bayes’ Theorem). If, and this is a big *if*, the prior probabilities of two competing and mutually exclusive theories are considered equal (which potentially makes for even more convincing sceptical conclusions, as the typically sceptic-friendly prior probabilities are overlooked), then we are left with a Bayes Factor, which at least helps us determine which theory the ‘current evidence’ favours. In this case, the absolute probability of the theory’s being true will not be known, nor will we know the actual relative likelihood of the theories considering *all* the evidence. But the relative likelihood of a particular theory (compared with the competing theory), when only considering the ‘current evidence’, can at least be determined.

Overlooking the prior probabilities seems too concessionary and ‘unBayesian’, especially when considering a fanciful hypothesis, but when the alternative hypotheses include fabrication, the point is still easily made how really convincing evidence is required. After all, fabrication is incredibly easy, and common, and does a fantastic job in explaining historical inaccuracies, anachronisms and contradictions! When ‘the evidence’ does include such inaccuracies and contradictions (random example: the Bible), fabrication will always look like a plausible explanation. When the audience is then reminded that the overlooked but technically unknown priors (in this example) would have greatly supported the sceptical hypothesis, the believer’s fanciful hypothesis begins to appear positively preposterous.

So what does Bayesian reasoning mean for extraordinary and miraculous claims? By definition, extraordinary claims are not ordinary. In other words, they are not likely, just as miracles are, by definition, highly improbable. Extraordinary claims and miracles suffer from extraordinary low prior probabilities. This is justified by all the background knowledge – for example, similar claims may have all been proven false. Typically, extraordinary claims ought to be compared with far more ordinary or likely claims; claims that have a much higher

probability. I take the point about low prior probabilities even further, declaring that sometimes we can consider 'infinitely small' prior probabilities. For instance, when considering claims about what 'God' did, and realising that God must be identified, out of many thousands and millions of gods humanity has already imagined, and infinite numbers of slightly different gods that are not yet imagined but still epistemically possible... More on this later.

So now that we have considered the theory, the competing theories, and the background knowledge, which element is left? The 'current evidence', the evidence for the extraordinary claim. Given the inherent unlikelihood of the extraordinary claim, and the inherent likelihood of the competing claims (such as fabrication), it should hopefully now be clear that the 'current evidence' needs to be so impressive as to overcome the extraordinary claim's unlikelihood, to the exclusion of the rather ordinary claims. The evidence must itself be extraordinary! And as we have seen, when it comes to the Bible's claims about Jesus, the sources are anything but…

A proper Bayesian treatment of Jesus' resurrection

It is time to put Bayesian methods – and also the Bible – to the test. What follows is a short, but ridiculously important, case study which highlights the superiority of Bayesian reasoning, while also justifying a sceptic's rejection of the Christian faith. According to the Bible, Jesus was raised from the dead, presumably by some sort of god. Given that dead people tend not to come back to life, most resurrection accounts are undeniably false (as the Christian would obviously be happy to accept), and that gods tend to be fictional characters, this story is inherently very unlikely to be historical. Nevertheless, the Criteria of Authenticity could support this story's legitimacy, at least in the same way that certain Biblical scholars employ them.

For example, this story is *multiply attested*, throughout the books of the New Testament. Furthermore, this is a potentially *embarrassing* claim, as God would effectively be killing and raising himself (and can't think of

a better way to save mankind than that), so why would believers in this God make it up? It must be true! Of course, more sceptical historians would immediately reject the Biblical account of Jesus' resurrection, due to the involvement of miraculous or supernatural components. John P. Meier inadvertently revealed a flaw in the Criteria of Authenticity in arguing that they could support miracle traditions, demonstrating the uncritical nature of certain Biblical scholars, and the willingness to accept implausible explanations.

That this story is embellished (at best) is a conclusion that is simply arrived at by employing the principle of analogy (such exaggerations are typical of myths), or in considering that history favours the most likely explanations, while miracles are by definition, very unlikely. One scholar who refutes supernatural explanations is Hector Avalos, who claims that Biblical scholarship is primarily a religionist enterprise and opposes the use of Biblical sources as reliable historical accounts. Avalos warns scholars to be careful how they use terms such as 'facts' and 'evidence'; he says that such passages in the Bible are evidence that these particular *stories* existed (or perhaps that certain people believed these events occurred), not that the event in question actually happened.

Bart Ehrman also dismisses miraculous claims. Hoping for sources that would be would be numerous, independent, contemporary, coherent, fairly disinterested eyewitness accounts, he acknowledges that the main sources discussing Biblical claims such as Jesus' resurrection are few, relying upon each other, written decades after the alleged events, problematic, contradictory, biased, and written by anonymous authors who were not eyewitnesses. As discussed earlier, historians must try and determine the most probable explanations, while miracles by definition are highly improbable explanations. They are considered to be miracles because they overturn scientific laws. If the books of the New Testament mention events such as miracles that do not fit into what scientists and scholars know of the world today (the laws of physics for example), and it happens to be more analogous to what is known of myth, then these stories must be rejected as literal and true accounts. It is far more likely that a person simply lied than that 'nature should go out of her course'.

These are all good reasons to reject this miraculous story, but the unlikelihood of this version of the story being authentic can be demonstrated more formally, through Bayesian methodology. Since Jesus either was resurrected from the dead by God (*h*), or was not (*~h*), *P(h)* and *P(~h)* must add up to 1, which makes for a relatively simple set of calculations. But there is one aspect of this formula that renders precise calculations unnecessary. In fact, I would argue that employing Bayesian reasoning without calculations is potentially more useful and reliable, given that a multitude of errors can be made when assigning quantitative values. The inherent probability of the resurrection theory (without yet considering the current evidence, namely the Gospel accounts), *P(h|b)*, is extraordinarily small. Conversely, *P(~h|b)*, is very large, as it includes naturalistic (and therefore more probable) explanations, such as outright fabrication, rendering the probability of *h* being true virtually 0%.

Explaining further, *P(h|b)* is so small partly because no account of people being raised from the dead, with the involvement of an unproven god or not, has ever been confirmed. Such acts are also not analogous to our understandings of biology and physics, while they are analogous to fiction and mythology. The theory that Jesus was not raised from the dead by God, *~h*, includes the explanation, 'the claim was simply fabricated'. This is an explanation that is very likely, especially when dealing with claims that violate the laws of physics. It is so much easier (and thus more probable) to write a fictitious story that you came back from the dead after 3 days, then actually coming back from the dead after 3 days. Getting back to my earlier point about the 'infinite possible gods', if the claim of Jesus' resurrection points to and involves the specific Christian god, the prior probability is effectively 0% as there is no evidence pointing to that specific god, out of the infinite gods that could possibly exist. And then we must consider that no god has been proven anyway, but we can't reduce the prior probability to less than zero…

This all means that the revealed evidence, *e*, did not even need to be seriously considered in order to rationally dismiss the claim (*h*). The evidence must be so extraordinary and thorough that it overcomes the inherently low *P(h|b)* and the inherently large *P(~h|b)*. In the specific case of Jesus' resurrection, the evidence is very poor, stemming from

anonymous texts which rely on and build on each other, and which are filled with errors, myths, and interpolations. Given that such evidence works well for the alternative theory of fabrication (as well as other naturalistic hypotheses), there is no extraordinary evidence that overcomes the inherently low prior probability, to the exclusion of all other possible explanations. As this case study and interlude demonstrates, the resurrection theory can be easily dismissed, and Bayesian reasoning is shown to be formally and mathematically valid, even if precise calculations are not done.

Given that the claim is inherently implausible, the evidence is poor, and alternative explanations such as fabrication are highly plausible, the matter can be considered settled. It is reasonable to believe that Jesus, if he even existed (non-existence theories would also be factored among the alternative hypotheses), was not resurrected from the dead by God. While the increasingly-maligned Criteria of Authenticity used by many Biblical scholars can be used to support the supernatural account, Bayesian thinking forces them to be more transparent about their conclusions, while leading competent historians and other scholars towards far more plausible theories. Before we move on to some possible objections, please consider (as other alternative explanations) the possibilities that Jesus rose naturally from the dead, with no help from any personal god, and also the possibilities that other gods (such as Jupiter, Shiva, Lucifer) raised Jesus, which further damages claims of Jesus' resurrection.

That alternative gods could have raised Jesus doesn't affect the resurrection claim per se but affects its ability to be used as proof of the existence of the Christian god and/or the truth of Christianity, which is inevitably what Christians make of it. As mentioned earlier, as the existence of a particular god has never been proven, we can come up with infinite theories as to which god raised Jesus from the dead, which makes the inherent probability of the hypothesis, 'Jesus was resurrected from the dead by Yahweh, the Christian god', approach zero. So in sum, even the story of Jesus' resurrection cannot necessarily be taken to be good evidence for the existence of the Biblical Jesus, or the Christian god.

Objections

I wouldn't be much of a Bayesian if I didn't consider some of the alternative views and numerous objections to this sort of reasoning! So in the interests of transparency, we shall briefly discuss some of the actual and possible objections to Bayesian thinking. Firstly, there is the common objection that Bayes' Theorem is mathematical and has little use in fields filled with quantitative uncertainties. An example is provided by Stephanie Louise Fisher, whose article, *An Exhibition of Incompetence: Trickery Dickery Bayes*, attacks Carrier's use of Bayes' Theorem in historical studies. She claims that 'Bayes' theorem was devised to ascertain mathematical probability. It is completely inappropriate for, and unrelated to historical occurrence and therefore irrelevant for application to historical texts'. Fisher overlooks the simple fact that all historical claims are probabilistic. Ironically, in the same article, she herself makes a probabilistic historical claim about the languages Jesus is *likely* to have spoken.

Now it is true, that assigning quantitative values can be difficult, but that is true for so many methods and academic fields. Deal with it. No matter how much we know, or think we know, we are generally never completely certain about anything. What makes Bayesian reasoning so rational and useful, is that it actually speaks to what is rational to believe. It does not claim to somehow reveal the ultimate truth; it only claims to present us with the most rational explanations, given all our knowledge up to this point. Furthermore, the natural language version of Bayes' Theorem presented, and the previously mentioned modified Bayes' Rule (resulting in a Bayes Factor), makes for much easier 'calculations'.

Furthermore, Bayesian methodologies are actually quite popular now in Philosophy of Religion (a deeply 'Christian field'), with numerous Christian scholars trying to prove Jesus' resurrection, through supposedly Bayesian methods! As my professional work reveals however, their work isn't Bayesian at all. Such scholars ignore the low prior probabilities (a crucial element of Bayesian methodology), very much privilege the sources (skewing the results towards their preferred hypothesis), and tend to overlook alternative theories such as fabrication (also key to

Bayesianism). Bayes' Theorem, like all other mathematical tools, is susceptible to the GIGO principle: garbage in, garbage out. In fact, such apologists tend to privilege the Gospels so much, that we can wonder why they bother with philosophical and Bayesian arguments at all. If God wrote the Gospels, and they are therefore all true, that settles it, job done!

A particular important objection to the use of Bayes' Theorem would typically come from an influential group of statisticians, the frequentists. As Bayesian methods use inevitably inaccurately derived prior probabilities, they surely cannot be as useful as frequentist methods, which seemingly utilise 'actual probabilities'... The latter point may actually be unreasonable and unachievable, given the theoretical need for infinite trials. Furthermore, the versatility of Bayes' Theorem allows it to incorporate any frequentist conclusions as background knowledge, impacting the prior probabilities used by Bayesians. As Carrier argues, there need be no conflict. Given that constantly updating the probabilities to incorporate new information is crucial to Bayesianism, it is easy to argue that Bayesianism is really just an epistemic form of frequentism.

Yet more objections may revolve around one-off events and creativity. Regarding creativity, we need not stifle our imagination or stop considering other possibilities simply because the ever-logical Bayesian reasoning seemingly supports the status quo. The arts, and even science, would suffer greatly. The impact of Bayesianism here is not to stop the consideration of alternative ideas and theories, but to encourage us to practice some constraint in immediately deeming these ideas and theories to be absolute truths. With regards to one-off events, consider the Sun's 'rising' every day. A critic of Bayesian reasoning could say that based on what has happened in the past (the Sun has risen every single day), Bayesians would always infer and believe that the Sun will rise tomorrow, even on the day before the Sun stops rising.

For example, if the Sun enters supernova, it will be destroyed, and so there will come a day when the Sun no longer 'rises'. The Bayesian would merely retort that Bayesian reasoning argues for what is likely, not necessarily what is true (in an absolutist sense), and that correct Bayesian reasoning would actually factor in *all* the evidence, including that which

indicates that the Sun would soon stop rising, and so would indeed make the accurate prediction that ‘tomorrow the Sun will not rise’. Go Team Bayes. Hopefully that doomsday scenario did not prove too upsetting. In actuality, our Sun does not have the ability to enter supernova, so we have nothing to worry about on that front. Instead, the Sun will just become a red giant and will probably engulf the Earth, or simply boil off Earth’s water, ending all life as we know it. Phew.

Concluding remarks

Bayesian reasoning is a very logical and reasonable way of utilising the available evidence and formulating probabilistic conclusions. It is not only helpful in mathematics and science, but also in many of the humanities and social sciences, such as in the fields of philosophy and history. Given that Bayesian methodology demands incorporating all our current knowledge and forces us to consider alternative explanations, it would seem to be a great challenge to find an academic discipline, or even an area of life, in which Bayesian reasoning is not at least helpful. Utilising Bayes’ Theorem demonstrates that what may have previously been claimed intuitively or expressed informally, can now be stated mathematically. When a believer tries to convince us to accept what James Randi might call ‘woo-woo’, the beautifully simple mathematics of the good Reverend Thomas Bayes can be invoked to justify this dismissive response: ‘Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence’.

Famous philosopher of religion Alvin Plantinga thinks he has given his fellow Christians the ability to call their beliefs rational, with an argument that virtually (an admittedly crude paraphrase) amounts to, “we can believe what we want to believe, and we don’t need evidence”. That of course gives no confidence to the Christian believer that they shouldn’t believe in Allah, Zeus, or the Flying Spaghetti Monster… Here is my take on what we can call rational. Bayesian reasoning allows us to make probabilistic determinations about a hypothesis, considering all the evidence, and considering the relative likelihood of alternative hypotheses. Bayes’ Theorem tells us, based on all our knowledge gathered thus far, what is rational to believe. Religion is one aspect of our lives that cannot

stand against the logic of Bayesian reasoning. Theories and beliefs revolving around miraculous events and claims of gods are incredibly improbable. It is known.

Part II: There is no God

This part of the book will be far shorter and less referenced than the first, even if there is seemingly a lot more at stake. The main reason is that Part I focussed on the Biblical Jesus, which tends to be the key focus whenever the Christian God is being discussed. Furthermore, research on Jesus allows us to analyse some historical sources. When it comes to purely supernatural concepts, such as the Christian God, Zeus, dragons, aliens, etc., we really do not have much to work with; just a bunch of hollow claims. The atheist's or agnostic's scepticism is easily justified. The key issue is the burden of proof. Non-believers can't be expected to bear the burden of proof, as they aren't the ones making any extraordinary claims. And nobody, believers included, should be expected to disprove claims of all other gods (the 'pagan' ones we don't happen to believe in), mythical beings (like dragons and leprechauns), crackpot theories, hypothetical and epistemically possible gods (like the Flying Spaghetti Monster), etc.

It is up to the believer to prove that their god exists. If they don't, how would we know which – if any – is the *true* god that deserves our attention? As Homer noted, choosing the wrong god would probably result in us making God madder and madder.[325] The old "prove my God doesn't exist" 'argument' is utterly ignorant, pathetic and desperate. I should know, I resorted to it myself as a former fundamentalist Christian, the very second I realised I couldn't prove my god's existence. And my faith went downhill from there. Without positive, and as the interlude explained, extraordinary, evidence for a supernatural claim, we don't have any good reason to believe. Evidence to the contrary is not necessary. So the focus of Part II is not to produce any arguments that 'prove atheism true' or 'prove all religions false', but to discuss various claims made about God, such as the conclusions of philosophical arguments for God's existence, and their failings.

While we will generally be discussing Yahweh, the commonly accepted God of the Jewish and Christian faiths, these principles could

easily apply to any god (particularly those of monotheistic traditions), the miracle-working Jesus of the Bible, and just about any supernatural concept you can think of. Even the Invisible Pink Unicorn.

Chapter 5: Three ways to prove God's existence

As stated in the preface, my focus is on the evidentialist claims of god. I have no compelling desire to criticise those who place great importance on faith or ritual, and there is little opportunity to reason with somebody whose beliefs are not grounded in reason, or who argues in a circle. For example, little can be gained by engaging with those that believe that God exists because the Bible says so, and who know that the Bible speaks true because God wrote it… To the believer who acknowledges the importance of evidence, and who thinks they have the evidence, an interesting and hopefully fruitful and respectful discussion can take place. In this chapter, we will discuss the various ways that one could attempt to prove God's existence, and how they are generally found wanting.

Scientific arguments

A posteriori ("from the later") arguments are generally arguments that have been confirmed empirically. This is how you really 'prove' things, if that's even possible – but let's not get too philosophical just yet (keep in mind that such extreme scepticism aids the non-believer, not the believer who relies on certainty and absolutist claims). They rely on empirical evidence. Science. Actual evidence, which hard-working and honest people strove for. They rolled up their sleeves, got off their couches, pimped themselves out to desperate and ridiculously wealthy widows to secure funding, did the bloody research, and actually found some stuff out.

That's how it's done. Empirically. Experimentation and observation. Observed; by our five senses. Such evidence would actually prove God's existence, and quite easily. If God showed up tomorrow, and we could all see him, hear him, smell him, touch him, taste h… Okay, you get the picture, seeing him is fine. There would be no question. There would be no doubt. There would be no need to believe. It would just be. Empirical, a posteriori, or scientific evidence for God's existence would be the most

convincing and accepted form of evidence imaginable. It should also be the easiest, if God did actually exist.

Mere mortal: “Yo God, where you at, foo?”

God: “Sup bra? I be chillin’ up here in mah crib, dawg!”

Done. It is a problem that has perplexed believers and non-believers alike, for centuries. Why is God hiding? In fact, when looking at the evolution of the books of the Bible and more modern sources, God seems to make fewer and fewer public appearances, culminating with absolutely none, now that we live in an age of videos, camera phones, YouTube, social networking, and the like. Despite the fact (proven Biblically at least) that so many people came to believe in God because they had plenty of direct empirical evidence, God seems content to deny us modern, and less superstitious and gullible people such excellent confirmation of his existence. He, or she, gives us nothing. And yet the expectations on us are the same as for the easily-fooled and easily-swayed peoples of the Biblical times, who, for some reason, were given mounds of evidence.

Now what I specifically mean with empirical evidence of God is evidence that is *direct* and *exclusive*. For instance, a believer might claim that the world is evidence of God’s existence, because he created it. Well, that is not direct evidence. That is evidence of the world itself, not of God (which was just assumed). Furthermore, this claim is not really exclusive. Your god may have created the world, but what about someone else’s god? What about something we might not even call a god at all? There are also believers that take ambiguity to extremes, claiming for instance, that “God is love”, and “that tree over there, that’s God!” Of course, that is not exclusive at all, as it could be an alternative god, or could simply be what it looks like. A tree. With a squirrel on it. Hangin’ a dump. No Consuela, it’s not the ‘holy mother’, it’s a piece of toast. In all seriousness, religious believers have never provided us with direct and exclusive evidence of any particular god’s existence. Over the last 10,000 years of human civilisation, this is all the empirical evidence monotheists have presented:

insert frog croaking noises here

I originally intended 10 blank pages while encouraging the reader to hum “Entrance of the Gladiators” (that music often associated with circuses), but my editor wisely instructed me to tone it down. We don’t actually have any empirical proof of God’s existence, which is a real shame given that his followers bear the burden of proof. If we saw the Judeo-Christian God come down from the clouds, speaking to us all in our own languages, setting drenched wood on fire, causing long-deceased people to rise up out of their graves; then we will have some evidence worth taking seriously. Unfortunately, miracles such as this don’t happen ‘anymore’. They only seemed to happen during a period of the Earth’s history when people were (relatively) scientifically ignorant, incredibly superstitious, and didn’t yet invent cameras, iPhones, video, or YouTube.

For the apologist to make excuses about why God doesn’t perform such obvious miracles today is ad hoc and inconsistent. According to the Bible, this is how so many people came to believe. Moses and Elijah[326] supposedly revealed the power of God through ‘impossible’ acts. Jesus too (allegedly God in physical and earthly form), supposedly convinced many by performing numerous miracles, including coming back to life and physically appearing, after his death, in front of soon-to-be followers. Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and the others did not convince new believers by showing them ancient texts that claimed that miracles happened thousands of years ago; they convinced them by performing miracles in the ‘here and now’.

If the great Apostle Paul was only convinced due to the miracle on the Damascus Road, and supposedly lived around the same time as Jesus, surely we lesser mortals, raised in an increasingly-secular and rational world, far-removed from those impressive times, should be given *at least* the same opportunities? Whether it’s because the world is so full of sin or not, whether God just wants to be so mysterious or not, the fact of the

matter is, he gives us no good reason to accept his existence. He just refuses to come out of the closet. And any apologists' claims that God simply *can't* provide us with empirical evidence because he is non-physical, blasphemes God's supposedly limitless power, and makes a mockery of their own professed beliefs about Jesus.

While empirical evidence is the only way we could actually prove God's existence, beyond any reasonable doubt, in thousands of years of human civilisation and religion, believers have not offered up a shred of it. No wonder so many fundamentalists hate science. Note that I'm very careful in not claiming that absence of evidence is evidence of absence, although that can be true in some cases (such as the lack of radiation being evidence that a nuclear explosion did not take place). But it is true that we lack direct and exclusive scientific proof of God, and it is also true that if God exists, and he or she wanted us to know it, observing such evidence would be ridiculously easy.

Historical arguments

This is the reason why we are discussing God in the first place. Because ancient documents, such as the books of the Bible, make historical claims. God created the world, God sent plagues to Egypt, God slaughtered millions of innocent babies, Jesus walked on water, Jesus died for our sins because God couldn't think of any better way, Jesus was raised from the dead by God, etc. These are common claims made by Jews and Christians. They are scientific and historical claims, and they can be questioned as such. They require evidence.

There's just one massive problem: history cannot prove a religion's supernatural claims. A religion that makes supernatural claims, that makes mention of miracles, cannot be confirmed historically. As discussed in Part I, though it might sound odd, history is not the determination of what actually happened – we don't have access to that. If we had a time machine, perhaps we could find out what *actually happened*, although it would no longer be a historical argument, but an empirical argument, as we would have directly observed it. Instead, history tries to explain what

most *probably happened*. [327] Since a miraculous hypothesis, by definition, is generally the least likely explanation (otherwise it wouldn't be miraculous!), it cannot be proven by historical means.

We earlier discussed the important principle of analogy which justifies the historian's bias against miraculous explanations. *Any* naturalistic explanation makes for a better historical argument, than one that makes appeals to the supernatural, even if that natural argument is boring, such as "the Babylonian Jews exaggerated", or complex, such as, "the Romans and the Sanhedrin cooperated in an elaborate conspiracy, to steal Jesus' body, leaving an empty tomb". Those theories, while unpopular with believers, are far more likely to be true than "God really did send an angel down to Earth to slaughter thousands of Assyrian soldiers" or "God raised Jesus from the dead, and that explains the empty tomb". And complete fabrication, particularly when dealing with supernatural stories, might be the most probable explanation of all.

As one final example, you see a man walk on the road. Is this how you would react? "Oh my god! He's walking on the ground! He's the Messiah! We are not worthy!" Of course not. Because there's nothing unlikely about walking on the ground. You take the same guy, make him walk on water. Now you got a Messiah. That's a miracle, because it's so bloody unlikely. But history can't confirm that. Why? Because it's so bloody unlikely. Historical evidence simply cannot prove God's existence, or support any supernatural theory. Bearing all this in mind, there is no point crying foul and criticising sceptical historians for how they go about their work, or bemoaning the fact that historical research is inherently 'naturalistic'. That is how history is done. If that doesn't work for you, don't make historical claims. Find some other way to prove God's existence.

Philosophical arguments

There is no direct and exclusive empirical evidence of God's existence, and history cannot prove the supernatural. And so we come to philosophy, according to philosopher Quentin Smith, the last arena in which rational, academic battles over God's existence can realistically be waged.[328]

Unfortunately, the conclusions of purely philosophical or *a priori* ("from the earlier") arguments have not been confirmed with rigorous testing, so must be taken with a grain of salt. Already the believing evidentialist is at a disadvantage. Please note that many scholars would label a majority of these philosophical arguments *a posteriori* as they seem to rely on some sort of scientific evidence or concepts (such as the Big Bang), but I still label them *a priori*, as none of this evidence is direct and exclusive evidence of God per se. So they are *a priori* in the sense that these arguments are being made without the availability of any direct evidence of God's existence, and in any case, they are philosophical arguments.

Now these philosophical arguments simply come about by thinking; no historical or scientific research is necessary. No need to roll up our sleeves and do some actual work. We just sit on the couch, or perhaps the toilet, think really hard, and then bam! "I figured it out, *my* god must exist." These arguments are lazy, ambiguous, speculative, discriminatory, and often appeal to our ignorance (our not knowing something). Such arguments only make inferences, they prove nothing. Common philosophical arguments used by Christian apologists include (crudely summarised):

- The cosmological argument: We don't know how the universe began, or even if it began. "I know, *my* god did it!"
- The teleological argument: Everything in the universe fits so perfectly, as if it was designed that way. "I know, *my* god did it!"
- The moral argument: Somehow, people seem to instinctively know what is 'good' and what is 'evil'. "I know, *my* god did it!"

Because there's something we can't explain, "*my* god did it". These are not only appeals to ignorance, but also beg the question (assume controversial premises, that not everyone will agree on). Such apologists point to a gap in our understanding and fill it with "*my* god". This makes the entire process speculative; falling far short of the certainty many of us would require in converting. Another problem is that as our knowledge of the universe grows, these 'ignorance gaps' get smaller; hence the ever-shrinking "god of the gaps". The word 'my' was also repeatedly stressed, to make obvious the discriminatory and offensive nature of such

arguments. Why must it be the Judeo-Christian god? Could it not be the Muslim god? Could it not be one of the Hindu gods? Could it not be Zeus, Osiris, or the Flying Spaghetti Monster? Could it not even be a god we haven't yet imagined or encountered?

To these philosophical theologians, or as I call them, 'New Theologians' (due to their relatively high levels of scholarly sophistication and knowledge), if there is something we can't explain, the answer is, "God". The answer that answers everything, that answers nothing. Like "magic", or "because". Unless sceptics can come up with the exact answer, then the believer supposedly wins by default. Fortunately, that's not how honest truth-seeking works. That's not how science works. Sceptics have nothing to prove; they're not the ones making unjustifiable and extra-ordinary claims. *A priori* reasoning is often legitimate; but not when it comes to proving God's existence. In thousands of years, no philosophical argument has ever successfully proven the existence of any sort of god, [329] let alone a claimant's specific god – which we shall discuss further in the next chapter, and in my upcoming book on natural theology.

Concluding remarks

There are a number of ways in which one could prove God's existence, and yet, in the thousands of years they have been trying, nobody has ever been successful. Historical arguments can't prove any supernatural claims, due to the nature of how competent historical research is done. It is inherently naturalistic. More current evidence is required. In modern times, philosophical arguments have become quite popular, but they fail for a number of reasons, such as their being ambiguous, their reliance on controversial premises, and the need to be backed up by more direct, empirical evidence. On their own, philosophical arguments cannot prove God's existence, as they ultimately rely on information or evidence gathered through other means. And when it comes to direct and exclusive empirical or scientific evidence, there simply isn't any. Unfortunately for the evidentialist believer, only the empirical route provides a realistic avenue for God to be convincingly proven. We're waiting.

Chapter 6: Philosophical arguments for God's existence always fail

Given what we have already covered so far, this chapter may seem somewhat superfluous. In light of the current popularity of such arguments (thanks to the efforts of William Lane Craig, Richard Swinburne, and other New Theologians), it is still relevant to consider what makes a good philosophical argument, and to identify the specific problems with the common philosophical arguments for God's existence. Furthermore, I formulate my own argument as to why, in the absence of direct, empirical evidence, philosophical arguments for a specific God's existence always fail. I'll go into far more detail in an upcoming book (based largely on my doctoral dissertation and which will almost exclusively deal with the philosophical arguments of Christianity's top apologists), but we'll briefly consider some of the crucial problems with such arguments now, including typical forms of the arguments, with a big focus on Craig, as I perceive him as being Christianity's top apologist.

Contingency & Cosmological Arguments

1. Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence.
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
3. The universe exists.
4. The universe has an explanation of its existence.
5. Therefore, the explanation of the universe's existence is God.[330]

Arguments from contingency merely beg the question. Stated and unstated premises such as 'God is necessary' and 'the universe is contingent and so must have an explanation of its existence' are simply assumed, rather than factually established. Many philosophers understand the possibility that all things are necessary, which eliminates the need for a distinct entity (such as God) being the only necessary entity among all the contingent or non-necessary entities.

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.[331]

Cosmological arguments fail for many reasons, one of which being that if we assume that God could be uncaused, we can also assume that the universe might be uncaused as well. William Lane Craig's celebrated Kalam cosmological argument refines this idea, arguing that only those things which have a beginning require a cause; and the universe had a beginning.[332] Or so Craig thinks; the jury is still out on whether the universe as a whole had an ultimate beginning (Craig's argument tends to rely on the Big Bang, which could possibly be a localised event and not the absolute beginning of *all* things), making even Craig's more evolved argument an appeal to ignorance.[333] Furthermore, Craig's version of the argument only benignly concludes that the universe has a cause. It is only in the commentary of this argument that Craig feels that he can justify invoking God, and only after he assumes the existence of unembodied minds. So what is the evidence of the existence of unembodied minds? There isn't any.

Fine-Tuning and Moral Arguments

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
3. Therefore, it is due to design.[334]

Teleological (fine-tuning) arguments attempt to portray this universe as incredibly improbable, which can only seriously be empirically verified by pointing to the existence of other (devoid of life) universes, which simultaneously *justifies* an improbable universe's existence by *chance*, rather than by *design*. Such arguments also ignore the possibility that the various constants of the universe could converge to a handful of constants or parameters, or even one, alluding to *physical necessity*,[335] and also ignore the possibility that the universe's fine-tuned nature could point to the non-existence of such a powerful god.[336] Given that fine-tuning

could plausibly be explained by explanations such as *chance* or *physical necessity*, and the total lack of positive evidence for any design hypothesis, these arguments are completely underwhelming.

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.[337]

Axiomatic or moral arguments merely assume the existence of an objective standard of morality, which supposedly indicates God's existence, and in William Lane Craig's case, the moral argument is entirely circular. In a debate with competent philosopher Arif Ahmed at the University of Cambridge, we observe Craig's question-begging 'proof' of the existence of objective morality:

> But the problem is that objective values do exist, and deep down I think we all know it… Hence I think we all know *2*, objective values do exist.[338]

Offended by Craig's brand of 'philosophical argumentation', wishful thinking, and appeals to the majority, Ahmed's scathing rebuttal drew rare applause and laughter from the typically reserved audience:

> What is the argument? Well it was striking so I wrote it down. There are objective moral values because deep down we know there are. That's it, that's the argument. Now that may pass for an argument in Talbot Theological College, it may indeed pass for an argument in the White House, but, but this is, this is Cambridge and that doesn't pass for an argument here.[339]

In Craig's writings, he claims that the proof of objective morality is our moral experience, and this (of course) comes from God, who is assumed to exist, revealing the argument to be completely circular and useless.[340]

Personal Experience and Ontological Arguments

> You can experience God personally. This isn't really an argument for God's existence, rather it's the claim that you can know that God exists wholly apart from arguments, simply by immediately experiencing him.[341]

Arguments from personal experience are simply not worth seriously discussing, given the numerous naturalistic possibilities, including advances made in cognitive science.[342] Even when we overlook the possibility of intentional deceit, what some believers may consider to be personal experiences deriving from their god of choice, could actually be a temporary delusion, mental illness, or even contact from an alternative god or god-like entity. Of far greater interest are ontological arguments, as no other type of argument really justifies considerations of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good maximally-great entity, which most of us would generally agree is 'God'.

> 1. It is possible that a maximally great being exists.
> 2. If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world.
> 3. If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world.
> 4. If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.
> 5. If a maximally great being exists in the actual world, then a maximally great being exists.
> 6. Therefore, a maximally great being exists.[343]

Anselm's ontological argument is tautological in nature (in the sense that God is partly defined as something that necessarily exists),[344] allowing the theological philosopher to merely *define* God into existence, without any reference to empirical evidence. Alvin Plantinga's renowned and refreshed version of the argument (summarised by Craig, above) offers something different, but still fails. He basically argues that as a maximally-great entity is possible (God), it exists in some possible world, and it must then exist in all possible worlds (as it is maximally great…), so it must exist in the actual world too; so God exists, yay! But even this very clever version of the ontological argument relies on falsely equating *epistemic possibility* (where we say that something is possible simply because we don't yet know the answer) with actual or *metaphysical*

possibility, as Plantinga himself recognises, further conceding that his argument is not a 'proof' of God.[345]

And so we come back to Jesus

1. There are three established facts about Jesus: the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of his disciples' belief in his resurrection.
2. The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" is the best explanation of these facts.
3. The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" entails that God exists.
4. Therefore, God exists.

An over-arching problem with the philosophical arguments for God's existence is that they are generally irrelevant, insofar as the arguer intends to prove a specific god. Even if the already discussed arguments proved that *a* god exists (they do not, nor do they necessitate one god, or even a monotheistic or classical theistic type of personal god), they do not prove *the* God. To the Christian believer, *the* God is generally taken to be Yahweh. The few specific arguments that attempt to demonstrate the existence of Yahweh will inevitable rely on historical claims, particularly those revolving around Jesus. The above formation is William Lane Craig's version of just such a 'specific God argument'.

Armed with the knowledge contained in Part I and the interlude, we can easily identify numerous problems with such an argument. The revelation that history cannot prove miracles means we don't even have to seriously examine the argument, which is obviously historical in nature, but where's the fun in that? Very briefly then, let's race through Craig's argument. Craig asserts that there are facts about the historical Jesus, such as the discovery of his empty tomb, and the origins of the Christian faith, that make his hypothesis, "God raised Jesus from the dead", the most plausible explanation.[346]

As we discovered in Part I, the 'facts' Craig uses come from spurious and fictitious sources (a problem shared with Swinburne's argument, which we shall touch on soon), through the use of equally spurious methods. The Gospels, the main sources for information on the historical

Jesus, are anonymous, non-contemporary, evangelical, filled with myth and historical fictions, and likely not penned by direct eyewitnesses.[347] These alleged facts are generally sourced via the increasingly-maligned Criteria of Authenticity.[348] And while the criteria ought to be improved or utilised more competently by Biblical scholars (or simply just replaced by Bayesian methodologies), their very existence implies that Biblical inerrancy, and somewhat by extension, the Biblical Jesus, are fictions. This makes Craig's use of thus-derived facts quite ironic – given that he does believe in the Biblical Jesus, and seemingly, in Biblical inerrancy – and he also conveniently decides not to use the plausibility criteria (such as the criterion of natural probability) when it comes to promoting his miraculous hypothesis.

Moving on to Craig's hypothesis of choice, it is unnecessarily supernatural, relying on the existence of a being that had not yet been proven, and thus must be rejected by the historian in favour of more probabilistic explanations, such as outright fabrication. Of course, Craig might think that he has already proven a generic god, which he hasn't, but even that is irrelevant. This argument is meant to establish the existence of the Christian God, which is not actually necessitated by this argument. I could claim that all the philosophical arguments, and even this historical argument, fit with my own personal god, the great Overlord Shablublu. All hail Shablublu! Even if we assume (which we of course should not) that Jesus was raised from the dead by some god, this god could have been Quetzalcoatl, Ganesh, Loki, Chuck Norris, or the intergalactic alien dictator, Xenu. It could even have been Jesus who raised himself, in some sort of pantheistic scenario, which is not ruled out by these arguments. There is nothing in this argument that necessitates the existence of the Christian god, Yahweh.

Richard Swinburne also has such a 'specific God argument', one which is supposedly Bayesian. Swinburne argues that (the Christian) God's raising Jesus from the dead is a historical event. He impressively employs Bayes' Theorem in demonstrating the likelihood of his hypothesis to be 97%. In this important endeavour he attempts to incorporate *some* background knowledge, though he misuses the formula by incorporating unjustified probabilities, such as the prior possibility of God's existence

being 50%.[349] Swinburne claims that this is a conservative figure as God's existence has been virtually proven by the philosophical arguments, such as the teleological and cosmological arguments, but we have already exposed that lie. Swinburne also overlooks the possibility that another god may have been involved, drastically reducing the probability of his Christian-friendly hypothesis, and further overlooks the fact that resurrections are inherently implausible. In other words, not only does Swinburne's argument fail, as Craig's does, it is not really Bayesian at all.

My philosophical argument against philosophical arguments…

As indicated by the title of this chapter, it is my belief that, in considering the continuing absence of direct empirical evidence of God, and of course, the impossibility of historical proof of God, any future philosophical arguments for a particular God's existence will fail as miserably as the currently existing ones. And if we did one day have access to direct and exclusive empirical evidence of a specific God, we wouldn't need such philosophical arguments. Here is my 'philosophical argument against philosophical arguments for the existence of a specific god' which more formally expresses why philosophical arguments for God's existence can only prove a generic god, at best:

1. In the absence of direct and exclusive empirical evidence, philosophical arguments for a specific god's existence must rely on some sort of historical claim.
2. Historical claims cannot prove supernatural theories, such as those concerning the existence of a specific god.
3. Therefore, in the absence of direct and exclusive empirical evidence, philosophical arguments cannot prove the existence of a specific god.

The first premise should be relatively uncontroversial. It is obvious that the 'purely' philosophical or a priori arguments for God's existence produced thus far do not prove a specific god, and that any future purely philosophical arguments could not either. The issue of specificity can only be addressed with some sort of empirical or historical support. Craig

generally acknowledges this point, which is why his climactic argument relies so heavily on the historical claims of Jesus.[350] It is the second premise which some believers (not even all) would take issue with, but I have justified it numerous times throughout this book. Given the truth of the two premises, the conclusion is sound.

Even if…

Before we move on to the many conclusions, I'd like to play a game… I call this game *even if*. The aim of the game is to constantly and charitably concede an unproven point, in order to show on how many levels such evidentialist cases fail on. The focus is again on Craig's cumulative case for the existence of the Christian God, which I see as the most complete and promising case for God ever put forth by an apologist. Here we go:

0. All of the philosophical/historical arguments rely on false or unproven premises, meaning that they are unsound. Game on.

1. Even if… we assume that the philosophical arguments (such as the cosmological and fine-tuning arguments) are sound, they don't all necessarily indicate a god/s. For example, the Kalam cosmological argument only indicates a cause or creator, which could be some powerful alien, or an impersonal force.

2. Even if… we assume that these arguments point to some sort of God-like figure/s, there is nothing in them to necessitate that there is only one such figure. There could be one god, or there could be many gods. For example, one god may be the all-powerful entity of the ontological argument, and another god may be the moral lawgiver.

3. Even if… we assume that these arguments do argue for one all-powerful god, monotheism or classical theism is not necessitated. This one god could be of the deistic or pantheistic sort. Deism might be superior in explaining why God has seemingly left us to our own devices and pantheism could be the more logical option as it fits well

with the ontological argument's 'maximally-great entity' and doesn't rely on unproven concepts about 'nothing' (as in 'creation out of nothing'). A mixture of the two, pandeism, could be the most likely God-concept of all.

4. Even if… and this is the key issue that exposes the pointlessness of the philosophical arguments… we do assume one all-powerful god of the monotheistic type, we still do not know which god we are dealing with. We need to identify god, which is the point of historical arguments about Jesus. And as we have seen, they fail for many reasons, such as the use of 'facts that are not really facts'.

5. Even if… we assume that the dodgily-sourced 'facts' in such historical arguments about Jesus are truly facts, the arguments still rely on an incredibly improbable hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead.

6. Even if… we further concede that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead, it is not necessitated that another entity was responsible. This could have been a natural – albeit rare – event, or could possibly have involved some sort of non-god supernatural force or power, such as the all-pervading Dao of Daoism, the Force of Star Wars, or an all-encompassing essence as in certain variations of pantheism. If we are going to be open to all possibilities, we must also entertain the fantastic notion that Jesus, as a mortal, raised himself from the dead.

7. Even if… and the amount of concessions we have made so far is beyond ridiculous… we assume that Jesus was raised from the dead by another entity, there is still no logical link to the 'all-powerful god of the monotheistic type', whose existence we had already earlier conceded. There are many possibilities here, such as that Jesus was raised by a technologically-advanced alien, a lesser divine being, or a fellow human; perhaps with as-yet-undiscovered natural abilities, or a false prophet who was granted incredible powers by some Dark Lord. That Satan or some other evil being would perform miracles and create 'false religions' is no strange concept to monotheists, particularly Christian monotheists who are confronted with the

similarities between their faith and much older pagan religions. Even the Bible records the miracles of 'false prophets', such as the impressive works wrought by Moses' Egyptian rivals.[351]

8. Even if… and this is the same key issue as at #4… we assume that Jesus was indeed raised by the 'all-powerful god of the monotheistic type', it is still not necessitated that this god is Yahweh, the commonly-accepted god of Judeo-Christianity. In other words, God has still not been identified. There are many other gods (infinite actually) that fit with the arguments of natural theology, even if (as agreed earlier) we stick to the monotheistic tradition. There is nothing in these Jesus arguments that rules out the gods of other religious and mythical traditions, such as Zeus or Odin. Now there is still room for one more even if…

9. Even if… we charitably accept that Jesus being raised from the dead by God indicates that the god in question is of the Judeo-Christian tradition – which is certainly not necessitated by these arguments – there are still numerous gods that could have done the deed! This may be a massive shock to both believers and non-believers, but there is not necessarily just one god presented by the various versions of Judaism or Christianity. Early Christianity, for example, included Gnostic or unorthodox traditions of an imperfect Demiurge, who created this imperfect world, and who may have been lower in stature than Almighty God.[352]

The various Jewish traditions make the situation worse. Many scholars have noted that Yahweh, generally seen as the 'one God' of Jews and Christians, could possibly be lower in stature in the Old Testament to El, the father-god, and possibly Asherah, the wife of El. El's children include about 70 gods, including Yahweh, Baal, Moloch, and others. Baal in particular, will be familiar to readers of the Old Testament, as one of Yahweh's chief rivals, for the hearts and souls of the ancient Israelites. [353] Admittedly, the few verses that do indicate Yahweh's lesser place in the greater pantheon of gods headed by El relies on certain manuscripts of the Septuagint, a Greek

translation of some very early Hebrew Old Testament version, rather than on any Hebrew copy we have today.[354]

While apologists will certainly point that out, they will conveniently 'forget' to mention that the authoritative Hebrew version of the Old Testament we do have access to today, the Masoretic text, is heavily edited, and is nowhere near as old (and possibly reliable) as the Septuagint, and the related Peshitta Old Testament, or even, ironically, the New Testament! Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Israelites were originally Canaanites, whose gods happened to be El, Asherah, and their divine children.[355] In any case, it is made abundantly clear from the sources inside and outside the Old Testament, that there were many more gods that were recognised by the ancient Israelite and Jewish peoples.[356] Yahweh was eventually chosen to become the dominant god, and eventually, 'the only god'.[357] And yet Yahweh would continue to have divine rivals, thanks to Jewish (and later, Christian) Gnostic/mystical traditions.

10. Game over.

Now that was a lot of concessions! This just goes to show how much is wrong with these arguments. And I wouldn't even concede the first point – the arguments of natural theology are just not sound. We can see that there is much we can charitably concede to the believer, and still be justifiably unconvinced. Many of the 'even if' scenarios alludes to another issue, the 'so what?' question. Jesus' resurrection in itself, even if we ignore the fact that it cannot be proven to have happened historically, fails to pass the 'so what' test. Though many believers might consider it to be the central doctrine or miracle, and clear proof of the truth of their faith, arguing that Jesus was resurrected from the dead is actually irrelevant in practicing or proving the truth of Christianity.

For example, plenty of Christians do not even believe in a literal and physical resurrection, and I needn't refer to the curious – and often confusing – case of 'Christian atheists' such as Robert Price or myself. A modern example of the resurrection-denying Christ-follower is Bishop

Shelby Spong,[358] and ancient examples include the afore-mentioned Docetists, and similar Gnostic or Gnostic-type Christian groups. Furthermore, it is very much possible to believe that the resurrection occurred, without believing that Christianity is the true faith. One high-profile example is Pinchas Lapide, a Jewish historian who believed that Jesus was raised from the dead by God, and yet did not feel the need to become a Christian.[359] There is clearly a lot more work to be done in proving the truth of orthodox Christianity, or the existence of the Christian god, than simply pointing to the improbable example of a particular individual being raised from death.

Concluding remarks

This is by no means a thorough refutation of all the philosophical arguments for God's existence. But these are among the most popular, and perhaps most convincing arguments – and enough has been said here to demonstrate their inadequacies. There are specific problems with all the arguments, and there are general problems that apply to them all. The biggest issue is that such arguments can only be discussing a generic god, at best, making them irrelevant to most stakeholders. The premises of such arguments rely on information gathered or confirmed by other means (such as historical or scientific evidence). This means that none of the philosophical arguments, not even the ones that will be produced in future, can demonstrate a specific god's existence (in the absence of empirical evidence, which would make philosophical arguments redundant anyway). To argue for a specific god, there must be some element of historical (which as we have seen, also does not work) or empirical evidence.

Conclusion to Part II

There is not much more that can be said on the matter of God's existence. We simply have no good evidence for the existence of any god worthy of the name, let alone a specific god, such as Yahweh, the commonly accepted god of Judeo-Christianity. The evidence and arguments put forth would generally fall along three lines: philosophical, historical, and empirical. The philosophical arguments all fail for various specific reasons, they are generally irrelevant when discussing a specific god, and they ultimately rely on historical and/or empirical evidence, further pointing to their uselessness. Historical claims of God fail simply because of what history is. As history is the study of what probably happened, and supernatural and miraculous explanations are inherently improbable, history can never be used to support God's existence, at least apart from some sort of empirical conformation, which makes all other methods redundant.

Indeed, it is only the scientific or empirical route, which is a realistic option in proving a specific god's existence. Unfortunately, we currently have no access to direct and exclusive empirical evidence of any particular god's existence. Some religious apologists, William Lane Craig included, argue that as God transcends the physical world, and empirical research concerns just that, God cannot be expected to be proved empirically. If they wish to harm their own cases by limiting their available avenues, then so be it! But this is a cop-out, and completely illogical. If God exists and wanted us to know it, it would be nothing for her to manifest in the physical world to prove his existence to us all. In fact, according to their own Bibles, God has done this many times in the past, including one very big case (Jesus…), so there's nothing unreasonable about demanding empirical evidence at all. And if empirical evidence is indeed impossible, then it is too bad for the Christian evidentialist who also cannot rely on philosophical or historical methods for confirmation.

Interestingly, we could conclude that *all* these methods essentially reduce to empiricism. As we have seen, the philosophical arguments

cannot argue for a specific god – some element of historical or empirical evidence is necessary, which renders the philosophical arguments redundant. And as numerously stated, history cannot prove the miraculous as it is a probabilistic discipline, and we ultimately determine what is probabilistic on our observations of how the world seems to work. So once again, empirical observations are required. In other words, empirical evidence, of which we have none, is the only way we can prove a specific god's existence. Using empirical evidence to prove God's existence is the best way, should be the easiest way, and is in fact, the *only* way. It is counter-productive and technically irrelevant then, for apologists to claim that God cannot be proven empirically. More fool them.

From an evidentialist perspective, there is simply no good reason to believe in any sort of supernatural god, let alone the god of one specific religious tradition. Despite what the superstars of Christian apologetics would have us believe, there is no good evidence for God's existence.

Conclusion: There was no Jesus, there is no God

Or to put it in a less sensationalist manner: There is no good evidence to support the existence of the Biblical Jesus or to prove the existence of the Christian God. In Part I we discussed Jesus, the central figure of Christianity. After discovering how the poor methodologies and possibly religious or financial motives of Biblical scholars could negatively affect their research on Jesus, we found the sources for Jesus to be extremely poor. The state of the existing sources for Jesus made us realise why most critical scholars instantly dismiss concepts such as the inerrancy of the Bible or the existence of the Biblical Jesus, and why some are even questioning if there existed any sort of Jesus at all. We then moved on to a brief discussion on the increasingly-popular Bayesian reasoning, and why it makes sense to be sceptical about supernatural claims. That is not to say that we cannot dream or imagine, but we must be careful not to confuse our creativity for the revelation of absolute truths.

In Part II we discussed the ways in which the existence of a specific god could be proven, concluding that empirical evidence is the only reasonable option. History simply cannot prove the supernatural, while purely a priori philosophical arguments are irrelevant when it comes to a specific god, at least in the absence of historical evidence (which cannot support the supernatural) or empirical evidence (which would render such philosophical arguments unnecessary). And unfortunately for the evidentialist believer, we simply do not have any direct and exclusive empirical evidence for the existence of any personal god, let alone a specific personal god.

So have we proven atheism true? No, and as an atheist, I find such questions to be ignorant and a little offensive. Atheism makes no claims and need not be ‘proven true’. Have we proven that God does not exist? Again, no. That was not the aim, and should never be the aim, as it is impossible and unnecessary. What we have done, is examine the evidence and arguments put forth for God and for Jesus, and judged that they completely and utterly fail. We have seen that insofar as evidence is

related to reason, there is simply no good reason to believe the supernatural Christian claims to be true. The same generally applies for the supernatural claims of any monotheistic religious tradition. While I find pantheism to be superior in terms of the sociological and environmental implications, as well as its relative plausibility compared to monotheism (it does not rely on the unproven concept of 'nothing'), it too lacks evidence. There simply is no good evidence for God's existence, period.

Please note that this is not a commentary on whether people should believe in something or not. This is not the assertion that religion is bad for the world. Believers are free to believe what they like, and I gladly champion such freedoms. But they have no right to proclaim those beliefs as grounded in reason, logic, and science, unchallenged.

So what now?

So if God's existence is really unproven, meaning that it is irrational to pick one god to worship and claim all others to be false, the distraught (former) believer may wonder, "So what now?" The believer has been thrown overboard; surely, we should at least throw them a life-jacket? The short answer is, "That is a topic for another day." This book does not intend to criticise religion, to replace one form of religion with another, or to provide complete instructions on how to live a fulfilled life. This book only intends to show you that no God worthy of the name, with a heavy focus on the Christian God, has been proven to exist. This book is all about the evidence. I do however, have some parting suggestions:

- That you use this information to become more tolerant and respectful of other people's beliefs and theories, religious or otherwise.
- That you continue to think critically, and apply critical thinking skills to all facets of your life.
- That you continue studying philosophy, history, science, and world religions. Eastern, ancient Greek, Christian, whatever. Keep learning and keep growing. Just keep the first two points in mind.

The first suggestion is crucial. True knowledge is knowing that we really don't know. 'Not knowing' fosters tolerance, humility, and respect, so has incredible unifying power. Exclusivist faiths, like the various monotheisms, divide people. Their definite claims to truth create a boundary between those that believe in the one true god, and those that do not. By admitting that we really do not know which, if any, god or religion is true, we can acknowledge the possibility of religious pluralism, and we can respect each other and work together in harmony. It is incredibly ironic then, that the scepticism that is so often stereotypically associated with 'cold-hearted and closed-minded atheists', actually encourages crowd-pleasing pantheism, in ideals, if not in beliefs.

I also have my own little moral 'code' if you will, *Raph's guidelines to life*, which I am happy to share with you. I have developed this simple code after spending many years studying philosophy, health, positive psychology and world religions, and just generally reflecting:

1. ***Enjoy yourself.*** If you don't, what's the point? Look after yourself too; stay healthy.
2. ***Do no harm.*** There simply is no need to go out of your way to harm people, in your own quest for a good and enjoyable life.
3. ***When you can, if you can, help a brother out.*** Sister too. Why not? It's good karma. Plus, you are they, and they are you.

These principles essentially reflect the *Golden Rule*, the great ethic of reciprocity – which is quite pantheistic and can be found in just about every religion – that probably contributed greatly to the success of our species.[360]

I sincerely hope this book helped answer a few of your questions. Better still, I hope this book has provided you with some methodological tools, so that you don't need to rely on the assumed authority of people that don't really have a clue; myself included! Furthermore, I hope that this book has inspired you to ask even more questions. My great wish is that you equip yourself with the relevant knowledge and tools, so that you can (at least try to) find the answers for yourself.

Upcoming

Raphael is currently working on a ridiculously thorough refutation of the common arguments of philosophy of religion or natural theology, including – of course – William Lane Craig's arguments for God's existence. It is currently being reviewed and revised by prominent Philosophers of Religion and Religious Studies scholars. This book will also attempt to demonstrate the logical implausibility of the monotheistic concept, explores the theological tendencies of Philosophy of Religion, considers the plausibility and practical benefits of pantheistic worldviews, and ponders the sociological impact of certain sophisticated apologists, who Raphael calls the 'New Theologians'.

Please visit Raphael's websites for academic references, general and scholarly articles, and news on upcoming books and public engagements.

www.RaphaelLataster.com
www.PantheismUnites.com

Bibliography

Ahmed, Arif, and William Lane Craig. *Is Belief in God More Reasonable Than Disbelief?* La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2005. Audio CD.

Angus, Samuel. *Mystery Religions and Christianity*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003.

Arnal, William. "The Collection and Synthesis of 'Tradition' and the Second-Century Invention of Christianity." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 3-4 (2011): 193-215.

Atran, Scott, and Joseph Henrich. "The Evolution of Religion: How Cognitive by-Products, Adaptive Learning Heuristics, Ritual Displays, and Group Competition Generate Deep Commitments to Prosocial Religions." *Biological Theory* 5, no. 1 (2010): 18-30.

PBS. "Harold Attridge: Early Christians Interpreted Gospels Allegorically." Accessed 02/04/2012. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html.

Avalos, Hector. *The End of Biblical Studies*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007.

Avalos, Hector, and William Lane Craig. *The Resurrection of Jesus: Fact or Fiction?* La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2004. Audio CD.

Axelrod, Robert. *The Complexity of Cooperation: Agent-Based Models of Competition and Collaboration*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Barnhart, Joe E., and Linda Kraeger. *In Search of First-Century Christianity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000.

Barrett, David. "The Gospel According to Bart." *Fortean Times*, April 2007, 44-47.

Beilby, James K., and Paul R. Eddy, eds. *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Bennett, Clinton. *In Search of Jesus: Insider and Outsider Images*. London: Continuum, 2001.

Boman, Jobjorn. "*Inpulsore Cherestro*? Suetonius' *Divus Claudius* 25.4 in Sources and Manuscripts." *Liber Annuus* 61 (2011): 355-376.

Borg, Marcus J., and Ray Riegert. *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*. Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 1999.
Burridge, Richard A. *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
Richard Carrier. "Did Jesus Exist? Earl Doherty and the Argument to Ahistoricity." Accessed 02/04/2012. http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesuspuzzle.html.
Richard Carrier. "Ehrman on Historicity Recap." Accessed 11/09/2012. http://www.freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/1794.
Richard Carrier. "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic." Accessed 05/05/2012. http://freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/1026.
Carrier, Richard. *Not the Impossible Faith: Why Christianity Didn't Need a Miracle to Succeed*. Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2009.
Richard Carrier. "Proving History!" Accessed 01/04/2012. http://freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/255.
Carrier, Richard. *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012.
Carrier, Richard. *So… If Jesus Didn't Exist, Where Did He Come from Then?* Madison, WI: Madison Area Coalition of Reason, 2012. Video recording.
Chadwick, Paul, and Max Birchwood. "The Omnipotence of Voices. A Cognitive Approach to Auditory Hallucinations." *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 164, no. 2 (1994): 190-201.
Charlesworth, James H. *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008.
Chilton, Bruce D., and Craig A. Evans, eds. *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*. Leiden: Brill, 1994.
Clement. *The Stromata or Miscellanies, Volume 7*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.
Confucius, and David Hinton. *The Analects*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1999.
Christ on Campus Initiative. "Atheism: Five Arguments for God." Accessed 06/11/2012. http://www.henrycenter.org/media/cci/Craig-

Atheism.pdf.
Craig, William Lane. *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010.
Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008.
Crossan, John Dominic. *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.
Crossan, John Dominic. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994.
PBS. "John Dominic Crossan: Evolution of the Four Gospels." Accessed 02/04/2012. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html.
Csikszentmihalyi, Mark, and P. J. Ivanhoe. *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.
Darmesteter, James. *The Zend-Avesta*. New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898.
The Bible and Interpretation. "Did Jesus Exist?" Accessed 11/09/2012. http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/dav368029.shtml.
Day, John. *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.
Dickson, John. *Life of Jesus: Who He Is and Why He Matters*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
Diodorus, Siculus, and Charles Henry Oldfather. *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
Doherty, Earl. *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ*. Ottawa: Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999.
Doherty, Earl. *Jesus: Neither God nor Man*. Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009.
Drews, Robert. "The Lacuna in Tacitus' *Annales* Book Five in the Light of Christian Traditions." *American Journal of Ancient History* 1984, no. 9 (1984): 112-122.
Droge, Arthur J. "Jesus and Ned Ludd: What's in a Name?" *Caesar: A Journal for the Critical Study of Religion and Human Values* 3, no. 1 (2009): 23-25.

The Huffington Post. "Did Jesus Exist?" Accessed 12/04/2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bart-d-ehrman/did-jesus-exist_b_1349544.html.
NPR. "'Did Jesus Exist?' A Historian Makes His Case." Accessed 10/04/2012. http://www.npr.org/2012/04/01/149462376/did-jesus-exist-a-historian-makes-his-case.
Ehrman, Bart D. *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: HarperOne, 2012.
Ehrman, Bart D. *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.
Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
Ehrman, Bart D. *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
Ehrman, Bart D., and Michael Licona. *Debate - Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?* Matthews, NC: Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2009. DVD.
Eusebius, and Edwin Hamilton Gifford. *Preparation for the Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1981.
Evans, Craig A. *Life of Jesus Research: An Annotated Bibliography*. Rev. ed. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
Eve, Eric. "Meier, Miracle, and Multiple Attestation." *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3, no. 1 (2005): 23-45.
Feldman, Louis H. "Josephus (C.E. 37–C. 100)." In *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume Three, the Early Roman Period*, edited by William Horbury, W. D. Davies and John Sturdy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: Free Press, 2002.

PBS. "Paula Fredriksen: Religious Advertisements." Accessed 02/04/2012. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html.
Funk, Robert Walter. "Bookshelf: The Resurrection of Jesus." *The Fourth R* 8, no. 1 (1995): 9.
Funk, Robert Walter. *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.
Gager, John G. "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method." *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): 244-272.
Gager, John G. "Scholarship as Moral Vision: David Flusser on Jesus, Paul, and the Birth of Christianity." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 1 (2005): 60-73.
Garcia-Teruel, M. Gabriela. "The Untold? True? Story That Inspired the Legend." In *Avalon Revisited: Reworkings of the Arthurian Myth*, edited by María José Álvarez Faedo. New York: Peter Lang, 2007.
Garraghan, Gilbert J., and Jean Delanglez. *A Guide to Historical Method*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1946.
USA Today. "Richard Dawkins to Atheist Rally: 'Show Contempt' for Faith." Accessed 14/04/2012. http://content.usatoday.com/communities/Religion/post/2012/03/-atheists-richard-dawkins-reason-rally/1.
Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom.* New York: Basic Books, 2006.
Helms, Randel. *Gospel Fictions*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988.
Hitchens, Christopher. *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. New York: Twelve, 2007.
Hock, Ronald F. *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas: With Introduction, Notes, and Original Text Featuring the New Scholars Version Translation*. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1995.
R. Joseph Hoffmann. "The Jesus Tomb Debacle: R.I.P." Accessed 26/08/2012. http://rjosephhoffmann.wordpress.com/2009/05/15/the-jesus-tomb-debacle-rip/.
The Bible and Interpretation. "Threnody: Rethinking the Thinking Behind the Jesus Project." Accessed 01/04/2012. http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/hoffman1044.shtml.

Hoffmann, R. Joseph, and D. J. Grothe. *R. Joseph Hoffmann - the Jesus Project*. Amherst, NY: Center for Inquiry, 2007. Audio recording.
Howell, Martha C., and Walter Prevenier. *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.
Irenaeus. *Against Heresies, Volume 1*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.
Jackson-McCabe, Matt. "The Messiah Jesus in the Mythic World of James." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 4 (2003): 701-730.
Joseph, Peter. *Zeitgeist: The Movie*: Peter Joseph, 2007. Documentary film.
Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2010.
Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. *The Wars of the Jews*. Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2010.
King, Karen L. "Factions, Variety, Diversity, Multiplicity: Representing Early Christian Differences for the 21st Century." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 3-4 (2011): 216-237.
Krauss, Lawrence Maxwell. *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing*. New York: Free Press, 2012.
Laozi, and Stephen Mitchell. *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
Lapide, Pinchas. *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002.
Law, Stephen. "Evidence, Miracles and the Existence of Jesus." *Faith and Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (2011): 129-151.
Leeming, Henry. "*Josephus Slavonice* Versus *Josephus Graece*: Towards a Typology of Divergence." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 1 (2005): 1-13.
Lüdemann, Gerd. "Paul as a Witness to the Historical Jesus." In *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth*, edited by R. Joseph Hoffmann. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010.
Mack, Burton L. *Who Wrote the New Testament?: The Making of the Christian Myth*. San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1995.

Marcus, Joel. *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992.
Martyr, Justin, and Michael Slusser. *Dialogue with Trypho*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
Mason, Steve. Review of *Josephus on Jesus: The Testimonium Flavianum Controversy from Late Antiquity to Modern Times*, by Alice Whealey. *Phoenix* 58, no. 3/4 (2004): 383-386.
Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Vol. 2. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Vol. 1. New York: Doubleday, 1991.
Menzies, Allan, ed. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 9 - Recently Discovered Additions to Early Christian Literature*. New York: Cosimo, 2007.
Mettinger, Tryggve N. D. *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient near East*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001.
Meyer, Marvin W. *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
Meyer, Marvin W., and Charles Hughes, eds. *Jesus: Then & Now - Images of Jesus in History and Christology*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001.
Miller, Dale, and Patricia Miller. *The Gospel of Mark as Midrash on Earlier Jewish and New Testament Literature*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.
Moessner, David P. "'Eyewitnesses,' 'Informed Contemporaries,' and 'Unknowing Inquirers': Josephus' Criteria for Authentic Historiography and the Meaning of Παρακολουθέω." *Novum Testamentum* 38, no. 2 (1996): 105-122.
Moll, Sebastian. *The Arch-Heretic Marcion*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010.
Neyrey, Jerome H. "Encomium Versus Vituperation: Contrasting Portraits of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 3 (2007): 529-552.
Olson, Ken. "Eusebius and the Testimonium Flavianum." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (1999): 305-322.

Oppy, Graham. *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
Origen. *Against Celsus*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.
Origen, and Henry Chadwick. *Contra Celsum: Translated with an Introduction & Notes by Henry Chadwick*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.
Pagels, Elaine H. *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
Paine, Thomas. *The Age of Reason: Part the First, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*. London: R. Carlile, 1826.
Pakkanen, Petra. *Interpreting Early Hellenistic Religion: A Study Based on the Mystery Cult of Demeter and the Cult of Isis*. Helsinki: Suomen Ateenan-Instituutin Säätiö, 1996.
Philo, and Charles Duke Yonge. *The Works of Philo Judæus: The Contemporary of Josephus, Translated from the Greek*. London: H. G. Bohn, 1854.
Philostratus, and C. P. Jones. *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books 1-4*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.
Plantinga, Alvin, and James F. Sennett. *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.
Pliny, William Melmoth, and F. C. T. Bosanquet. *Letters of Pliny*. London: Echo Library, 2006.
Plutarch, and Frank Cole Babbitt. *Plutarch's Moralia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927.
Porter, Stanley E. *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
Powell, Barry B. *Classical Myth*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2008.
Price, Robert M. *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems*. Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011.
Robert M. Price. "Christ a Fiction." Accessed 10/07/2012. http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/robert_price/fiction.html.
Price, Robert M. *Deconstructing Jesus*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000.

Price, Robert M. *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003.
Price, Robert M., and Luke Muehlhauser. *How to Study the Historical Jesus*: Luke Muehlhauser, 2010. Audio recording.
Rank, Otto, Baron Raglan, Alan Dundes, and Robert A. Segal. *In Quest of the Hero: The Myth and Birth of the Hero*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.
Ranke, Leopold von, Sarah Austin, and Robert Arthur Johnson. *History of the Reformation in Germany*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1905.
Roberts, Alexander, ed. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 8 - Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century*. New York: Cosimo, 2007.
Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, A. Cleveland Coxe, Allan Menzies, Ernest Cushing Richardson, Bernhard Pick, and Amherst College. Class of 1880. Richardson., eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Vol. 6. Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886.
Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, A. Cleveland Coxe, Allan Menzies, Ernest Cushing Richardson, Bernhard Pick, and Amherst College. Class of 1880. Richardson., eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Vol. 1. Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885.
Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, A. Cleveland Coxe, Allan Menzies, Ernest Cushing Richardson, Bernhard Pick, and Amherst College. Class of 1880. Richardson., eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Vol. 3. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.
Robinson, James M., Christoph Heil, and Jozef Verheyden. *The Sayings Gospel Q: Collected Essays*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005.
Sagan, Carl. *Encyclopaedia Galactica*: PBS, 1980. Television program.
Schaff, Philip, ed. *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, Oration in Praise of Constantine*. New York: Cosimo, 2007.
Schaff, Philip, ed. *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*. New York: Cosimo, 2007.

Schaff, Philip, ed. *St. Augustine: City of God, Christian Doctrine*. New York: Cosimo, 2007.
Schweitzer, Albert. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*. New York: Macmillan, 1960.
Schweitzer, Albert, and William B. D. Montgomery. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1910.
Seneca, Lucius Annaeus, and John William Basore. *Moral Essays*. London: W. Heinemann, 1932.
Seneca, Lucius Annaeus, and Richard Mott Gummere. *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*. Vol. 3. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962.
Shanks, Hershel. "How the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament Differ: An Interview with David Noel Freedman - Part 1." *Bible Review* 9, no. 6 (1993): 34.
Simpson, Homer. *Homer the Heretic*: FOX, 1992. Television program.
Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2002.
Smith, Quentin. "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism." *Philo* 4, no. 2 (2001): 195-215.
Smith, Richard, Douglas M. Parrott, James M. Robinson, and Coptic Gnostic Library Project, eds. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 3rd ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.
Sober, Elliott. "The Design Argument." In *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by William Mann. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.
Spong, John Shelby. *Resurrection - Myth or Reality?: A Bishop's Search for the Origins of Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994.
Stenger, Victor J. *God - the Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007.
Strobel, Lee. *The Case for the Real Jesus: A Journalist Investigates Current Attacks on the Identity of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.
Suetonius, and J. C. Rolfe. *The Lives of the Caesars*. Vol. 2. London: Heinemann, 1914.

Swan, Peter Michael. *The Augustan Succession: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
Swinburne, Richard. *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
James Tabor. "Paul as Clairvoyant." Accessed 21/09/2012. http://jamestabor.com/2012/05/23/paul-as-clairvoyant-2.
Tacitus, Cornelius, Alfred John Church, and William Jackson Brodbribb. *The Annals of Imperial Rome*. Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005.
Tertullian. *Ad Nationes: Book I*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.
Thomassen, Einar. "'Forgery' in the New Testament." In *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, edited by James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
Thompson, Thomas L. *The Messiah Myth: The near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David*. New York: Basic Books, 2005.
Trzaskoma, Stephen, R. Scott Smith, Stephen Brunet, and Thomas G. Palaima, eds. *Anthology of Classical Myth: Primary Sources in Translation*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004.
Tubb, Jonathan N. *Canaanites*. London: British Museum Press, 1998.
Tuckett, Christopher. "Sources and Methods." In *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, edited by Markus Bockmuehl. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
Valantasis, Richard. *The Gospel of Thomas*. London: Routledge, 1997.
Whybray, Roger Norman. *Introduction to the Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
Wilhelm, Dawn Ottoni. *Preaching the Gospel of Mark: Proclaiming the Power of God*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.
Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
Wrede, William, and James C. G. Greig. *The Messianic Secret*. Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971.
Yamauchi, Edwin M. "Easter: Myth, Hallucination, or History? Part 1." *Christianity Today*, March 15, 1974, 4-7.

Yamauchi, Edwin M. "Easter: Myth, Hallucination, or History? Part 2." *Christianity Today*, March 29, 1974, 12-16.
Zeitlin, Solomon. "The Slavonic Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls: An Exposé of Recent Fairy Tales." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 58, no. 3 (1968): 173-203.
Zinner, Samuel. *The Gospel of Thomas: In the Light of Early Jewish, Christian and Islamic Esoteric Trajectories*. London: Matheson Trust, 2011.

---

[1] The Bible and Interpretation. "Threnody: Rethinking the Thinking Behind the Jesus Project," accessed 01/04/2012, http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/hoffman1044.shtml.

[2] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), p xxviii.

[3] Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012).; Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).; Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011).

[4] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p37.

[5] Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp17-20.

[6] Leopold von Ranke, Sarah Austin, and Robert Arthur Johnson, *History of the Reformation in Germany* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1905), pxi.

[7] Richard Carrier. "Did Jesus Exist? Earl Doherty and the Argument to Ahistoricity," accessed 02/04/2012, http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesuspuzzle.html.

[8] Gilbert J. Garraghan and Jean Delanglez, *A Guide to Historical Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1946), p168.

[9] Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012) p26-30.

[10] Hershel Shanks, "How the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament Differ: An Interview with David Noel Freedman - Part 1," *Bible Review* 9, no. 6 (1993): 34.

[11] Bart D. Ehrman and Michael Licona, *Debate - Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?* (Matthews, NC: Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2009), DVD.

[12] Robert M. Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), p351.

[13] John G. Gager, "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method," *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): 258-259.

[14] Eric Eve, "Meier, Miracle, and Multiple Attestation," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3, no. 1 (2005): 23-45.

[15] Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012), pp172-175.

[16] Some apologists make a big deal about how embarrassing it would have been for the supposedly Jewish Gospel writers to admit that it were women who found Jesus' tomb empty (which is not even that well established). This overlooks the possibility that the Gospel writer intentionally places such importance on women, to demonstrate just how different this new religion is, including its treatment of women, and other 'downtrodden' groups. Actually, isn't that kind of the point of Christianity? The same Bible has Jesus basically saying that the 'low shall be made high' and the 'high shall be made low'.

[17] Christopher Tuckett, "Sources and Methods," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p132.

[18] Stephen Law, "Evidence, Miracles and the Existence of Jesus," *Faith and Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (2011): 129-151.

[19] Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p109.

[20] Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012), p124.

[21] John G. Gager, "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method," *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): 259.

[22] Ibid.: 260.

[23] Craig A. Evans, *Life of Jesus Research: An Annotated Bibliography*, Rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p128.

[24] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), pp327-328.

[25] Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas: With Introduction, Notes, and Original Text Featuring the New Scholars Version Translation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1995), p109.

[26] John G. Gager, "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method," *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): p261.

[27] Ibid.: 258-259.

[28] Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), pp69,77,91,117.

[29] Hector Avalos and William Lane Craig, *The Resurrection of Jesus: Fact or Fiction?* (La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2004), Audio CD.

[30] Richard Carrier. "Proving History!," accessed 01/04/2012, http://freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/255.

[31] John G. Gager, "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method," *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): 244-245.

[32] James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), p18.

[33] Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), p119.

[34] Stephen Law, "Evidence, Miracles and the Existence of Jesus," *Faith and Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (2011): 129-151.

[35] We could also use the criterion of embarrassment. The Harry Potter series tends to portray muggles (non-magical humans) negatively, as we can see from the stories of his early life in London with his abusive relatives. Given that the writer of the stories is also a muggle, she would no doubt find this embarrassing, so it must all be true…

[36] John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp630-631.

[37] Bart D. Ehrman and Michael Licona, *Debate - Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?* (Matthews, NC: Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2009), DVD.

[38] Robert M. Price and Luke Muehlhauser, *How to Study the Historical Jesus* (Luke Muehlhauser, 2010), Audio recording.; James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p56.

[39] Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Part the First, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (London: R. Carlile, 1826), p49.

[40] Bart D. Ehrman and Michael Licona, *Debate - Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?* (Matthews, NC: Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2009), DVD.

[41] Ibid.; Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p42.

[42] Bart D. Ehrman and Michael Licona, *Debate - Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?* (Matthews, NC: Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2009), DVD.

[43] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p70.

[44] Ibid., pp77-82.

[45] Ibid., p56.

[46] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), pxxviii.

[47] John Dickson, *Life of Jesus: Who He Is and Why He Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), pp161-162.

[48] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011) p426-427.

[49] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp56-57.

[50] The Huffington Post. "Did Jesus Exist?," accessed 12/04/2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bart-d-ehrman/did-jesus-exist_b_1349544.html.

[51] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp77-82.

[52] Ibid., pp42-46.

[53] Ibid., p48.

[54] Galatians 1:11-12.

[55] Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), p215.; Even John P. Meier admits that this is the case with regards to Josephus and Tacitus, which are often viewed as the most significant extra-Biblical Historical Jesus sources: “As with

Josephus, so with Tacitus our observations must be tempered by the fact that the earliest manuscript of the *Annals* comes from the 11th century." See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p100.

[56] John G. Gager, "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method," *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): 254-256.

[57] Ibid.: 255.

[58] David Barrett, "The Gospel According to Bart," *Fortean Times*, April 2007, p47.

[59] Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), p212.

[60] Lucius Annaeus Seneca and Richard Mott Gummere, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 101.10-14.; Lucius Annaeus Seneca and John William Basore, *Moral Essays* (London: W. Heinemann, 1932), 6.20.3.

[61] Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans, eds., *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) p541.

[62] Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007) p69-70.

[63] Galatians 1:11-12.

[64] 1Corinthians 15:3-4.

[65] Hebrews 8:4.

[66] Philippians 2:5-11.

[67] Gerd Lüdemann, "Paul as a Witness to the Historical Jesus," in *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth*, ed. R. Joseph Hoffmann (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010), p212.

[68] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p235.

[69] Einar Thomassen, "'Forgery' in the New Testament," in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, ed. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p141.

[70] John 21:20-24.

[71] Mark 14:32-42, Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 22:45.

[72] Bart D. Ehrman and Michael Licona, *Debate - Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?* (Matthews, NC: Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2009), DVD.

[73] Robert M. Price and Luke Muehlhauser, *How to Study the Historical Jesus* (Luke Muehlhauser, 2010), Audio recording.

[74] Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), p119.

[75] Richard Carrier. "Did Jesus Exist? Earl Doherty and the Argument to Ahistoricity," accessed 02/04/2012, http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesuspuzzle.html.

[76] Hershel Shanks, "How the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament Differ: An Interview with David Noel Freedman - Part 1," *Bible Review* 9, no. 6 (1993): 34.

[77] The Huffington Post. "Did Jesus Exist?," accessed 12/04/2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bart-d-ehrman/did-jesus-exist_b_1349544.html.

[78] John G. Gager, "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method," *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): 256.

[79] Robert Walter Funk, "Bookshelf: The Resurrection of Jesus," *The Fourth R* 8, no. 1 (1995): 9.

[80] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp137-138.

[81] Matt Jackson-McCabe, "The Messiah Jesus in the Mythic World of James," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 4 (2003): 729.

[82] Ibid.: 729-730.

[83] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p97.

[84] John 8:44.

[85] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p533.; Steve Mason, review of Josephus on Jesus: The Testimonium Flavianum Controversy from Late Antiquity to Modern Times, by Alice Whealey, *Phoenix* 58, no. 3/4 (2004): 383-386.; John G. Gager, "Scholarship as Moral Vision: David Flusser on Jesus, Paul, and the Birth of Christianity," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 1 (2005): 64.

[86] John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p56ff.

[87] Origen and Henry Chadwick, *Contra Celsum: Translated with an Introduction & Notes by Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p43.

[88] Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus (C.E. 37–C. 100)," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume Three, the Early Roman Period*, ed. William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy, *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp911-912.

[89] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp60-64.

[90] Eusebius and Edwin Hamilton Gifford, *Preparation for the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1981), 12.31.

[91] Philip Schaff, ed. *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, Oration in Praise of Constantine* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p324.

[92] Ken Olson, "Eusebius and the Testimonium Flavianum," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (1999): 305-322.

[93] Solomon Zeitlin, "The Slavonic Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls: An Exposé of Recent Fairy Tales," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 58, no. 3 (1968): 173-203.; See also Henry Leeming, "*Josephus Slavonice* Versus *Josephus Graece*: Towards a Typology of Divergence," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 1 (2005): 1-13.; Avalos notes that extant manuscripts of the Greco-Roman sources in general, date from mediaeval times. See Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), p215.; Meier supports the idea that manuscripts from Josephus and Tacitus are very late. See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p100.

[94] R. Joseph Hoffmann. "The Jesus Tomb Debacle: R.I.P.," accessed 26/08/2012, http://rjosephhoffmann.wordpress.com/2009/05/15/the-jesus-tomb-debacle-rip/.

[95] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p572.

[96] Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2010), 19.1.1.

[97] Ibid., pp27,257,332.

[98] Ibid., p439.

[99] Ibid., p247.

[100] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p54.

[101] Ibid., p56.; Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), pp594-596.

[102] Cornelius Tacitus, Alfred John Church, and William Jackson Brodbribb, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005), p111.

[103] Robert Drews, "The Lacuna in Tacitus' *Annales* Book Five in the Light of Christian Traditions," *American Journal of Ancient History* 1984, no. 9 (1984): 112-122.

[104] Richard Carrier, personal communication, June 7, 2012.

[105] Peter Michael Swan, *The Augustan Succession: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp36-38,188.

[106] Justin Martyr and Michael Slusser, *Dialogue with Trypho* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), pp16,17.

[107] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p643.

[108] Alexander Roberts et al., eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 6 (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886), pp136-137.

[109] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), pp647-651.

[110] Pliny, William Melmoth, and F. C. T. Bosanquet, *Letters of Pliny* (London: Echo Library, 2006), pp156-157.

[111] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p52.

[112] Suetonius and J. C. Rolfe, *The Lives of the Caesars*, vol. 2 (London: Heinemann, 1914), Life of Claudius 25.4.

[113] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p633.; After a recent and exhaustive examination of the relevant manuscripts, Jobjorn Boman concludes: "Accordingly, I, in agreement with the modern editions of *De Vita Caesarum*, conclude that the original Suetonian spelling of the word in fact was *Chresto*." *Chresto* is equivalent to the proper name *Chrestus*, rather than the title of *Christ*. Boman also indicates that Christian manipulation of Suetonius' manuscripts may be responsible for readings that seem to support Jesus' historicity. See Jobjorn Boman, "*Inpulsore Cherestro*? Suetonius' *Divus Claudius* 25.4 in Sources and Manuscripts," *Liber Annuus* 61(2011): 376.

[114] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p53.

[115] Alexander Roberts, ed. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 8 - Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p737.

[116] Matthew 26-27, Mark 14-15, Luke 22-23, John 18-19.

[117] Matthew 27:12.

[118] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p655.

[119] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp66-68.

[120] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), pp513-518.

[121] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp98-104.

[122] Marvin W. Meyer and Charles Hughes, eds., *Jesus: Then & Now - Images of Jesus in History and Christology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), p73.

[123] William Arnal, "The Collection and Synthesis of 'Tradition' and the Second-Century Invention of Christianity," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 3-4 (2011): 193-215.

[124] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp77-85,92,97.

[125] Ibid., p117.

[126] Ibid., p103.

[127] Ibid., p76.; Marvin W. Meyer and Charles Hughes, eds., *Jesus: Then & Now - Images of Jesus in History and Christology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), p73.

[128] Marvin W. Meyer and Charles Hughes, eds., *Jesus: Then & Now - Images of Jesus in History and Christology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), p73.; James M. Robinson, Christoph Heil, and Jozef Verheyden, *The Sayings Gospel Q: Collected Essays* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), p663.; Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p80.

[129] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p56.; Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p127.

[130] Richard Carrier. "Did Jesus Exist? Earl Doherty and the Argument to Ahistoricity," accessed 02/04/2012, http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesuspuzzle.html.

[131] Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p127.

[132] Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p240.

[133] Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), p260.

[134] Thomas L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), p8.

[135] Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), pp10-12.

[136] PBS. "John Dominic Crossan: Evolution of the Four Gospels," accessed 02/04/2012, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html.

[137] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), p26.

[138] Ibid., px.

[139] PBS. "Harold Attridge: Early Christians Interpreted Gospels Allegorically," accessed 02/04/2012, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html.

[140] PBS. "Paula Fredriksen: Religious Advertisements," accessed 02/04/2012, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html.

[141] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), p59.

[142] 1Corinthians 15:1-4.

[143] Mark 1:1-3.

[144] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), pp79,80.

[145] Ibid., p239-241.

[146] Ibid., p59-260.

[147] Ibid., p62.

[148] Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012), pp199-204.

[149] Richard Carrier. "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," accessed 05/05/2012, http://freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/1026.

[150] Justin Martyr and Michael Slusser, *Dialogue with Trypho* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p16.; Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Jesus: Insider and Outsider Images* (London: Continuum, 2001), pp172-174.

[151] NPR. "'Did Jesus Exist?' A Historian Makes His Case," accessed 10/04/2012, http://www.npr.org/2012/04/01/149462376/did-jesus-exist-a-historian-makes-his-case.

[152] Allan Menzies, ed. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 9 - Recently Discovered Additions to Early Christian Literature* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), pp382-384.

[153] Jerome H. Neyrey, "Encomium Versus Vituperation: Contrasting Portraits of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 3 (2007): 529-552.

[154] Mark 1:1, Matthew 28, Luke 24, John 20:31.

[155] Luke 1:1-4.

[156] David P. Moessner, "'Eyewitnesses,' 'Informed Contemporaries,' and 'Unknowing Inquirers': Josephus' Criteria for Authentic Historiography and the Meaning of Παρακολουθέω," *Novum Testamentum* 38, no. 2 (1996): 105-122.

[157] Luke 1:5.

[158] Luke 22:45.

[159] Richard Carrier. "Did Jesus Exist? Earl Doherty and the Argument to Ahistoricity," accessed 02/04/2012, http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesuspuzzle.html.

[160] Mark 1:10.

[161] Mark 1:1.

[162] Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), p68.; Joe E. Barnhart and Linda Kraeger, *In Search of First-Century Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p120.

[163] Mark 16:6-8.

[164] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), p26.

[165] Joe E. Barnhart and Linda Kraeger, *In Search of First-Century Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp76,139.

[166] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), pp59-260.

[167] Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).

[168] William Wrede and James C. G. Greig, *The Messianic Secret* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971), pp237-241.

[169] Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?: The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1995), pp152-154.

[170] Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, *Preaching the Gospel of Mark: Proclaiming the Power of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), pxiv.

[171] Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), pp13-14.

[172] Mark 16:6-8.

[173] Mark 14:58.

[174] Roger Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), p14.

[175] Samuel Angus, *Mystery Religions and Christianity* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), p45.

[176] Robert M. Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp169-172.; Dale Miller and Patricia Miller, *The Gospel of Mark as Midrash on Earlier Jewish and New Testament Literature* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

[177] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p92.

[178] William Arnal, "The Collection and Synthesis of 'Tradition' and the Second-Century Invention of Christianity," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 3-4 (2011): 193-215.; On perceptions of Paul and his writings, John Gager calls on scholars to challenge long-held beliefs and venture into ‘unknown territory’. See John G. Gager, "Scholarship as Moral Vision: David Flusser on Jesus, Paul, and the Birth of Christianity," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 1 (2005): 60-73.

[179] Galatians 1:11-12.

[180] Galatians 1:15-16.

[181] 1Corinthians 11:23.

[182] 1Corinthians 15:3-4.

[183] Galatians 1:18-19.

[184] Galatians 2:11.

[185] James Tabor. "Paul as Clairvoyant," accessed 21/09/2012, http://jamestabor.com/2012/05/23/paul-as-clairvoyant-2.

[186] Richard Carrier. "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," accessed 05/05/2012, http://freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/1026.

[187] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp77-93.

[188] Ibid., p246.

[189] Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p389.

[190] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p248.

[191] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), pp354,355.

[192] Ibid., p368.

[193] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p248.

[194] Romans 14:1-4.

[195] 1Corinthians 8.

[196] Colossians 2:20-21.

[197] Mark 7:14-15.

[198] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), pp356-360.

[199] Romans 13:3, 1Peter 2:13-14.

[200] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), p19.

[201] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p127.

[202] Gerd Lüdemann, "Paul as a Witness to the Historical Jesus," in *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth*, ed. Hoffmann (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010), pp211,212.

[203] Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp12-20.; Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans, eds., *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp481-498.; Einar Thomassen, "'Forgery' in the New Testament," in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, ed. Lewis and Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p143.

[204] Hebrews 8:3-4.

[205] Philippians 2:5-11.

[206] Ephesians 3:4-5.

[207] Genesis 32:22-32.

[208] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p91ff.

[209] Romans 3:21.

[210] Romans 16:25-27.

[211] Colossians 1:24-27.

[212] Colossians 2:2-3.

[213] 1Peter 1:20.

[214] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p87.

[215] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies, Volume 1* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p21.

[216] Samuel Zinner, *The Gospel of Thomas: In the Light of Early Jewish, Christian and Islamic Esoteric Trajectories* (London: Matheson Trust, 2011), p291.

[217] 1Corinthians 2:8.; Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ* (Ottawa: Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999), pp100-101.

[218] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p53.

[219] Ibid., p56.

[220] 2Corinthians 6:2.

[221] 1Corinthians 5:9, Colossians 4:16.

[222] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), pxvi.

[223] James Tabor. "Paul as Clairvoyant," accessed 21/09/2012, http://jamestabor.com/2012/05/23/paul-as-clairvoyant-2.

[224] Matt Jackson-McCabe, "The Messiah Jesus in the Mythic World of James," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 4 (2003): 701-730.

[225] 1Corinthians 15:5.

[226] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p151.

[227] Galatians 1:18-19.

[228] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), p60.

[229] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), pp350-352.

[230] Origen, *Against Celsus* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p44.

[231] Richard Smith et al., eds., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p262.

[232] R. Joseph Hoffmann. "The Jesus Tomb Debacle: R.I.P.," accessed 26/08/2012, http://rjosephhoffmann.wordpress.com/2009/05/15/the-jesus-tomb-debacle-rip/.

[233] 1Corinthians 11:23-26.

[234] Mark 14:12-26, Matthew 26:17-30, Luke 22:7-39 and John 13:1-17:26.

[235] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), pp35-36.

[236] Robert M. Price and Luke Muehlhauser, *How to Study the Historical Jesus* (Luke Muehlhauser, 2010), Audio recording.

[237] Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp12-20.; Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans, eds., *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp481-498.

[238] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), p18.

[239] Marcus J. Borg and Ray Riegert, *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 1999).

[240] John 1:1.

[241] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).; Robert Walter Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991).; Albert Schweitzer and William B. D. Montgomery, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1910).

[242] Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011).

[243] M. Gabriela Garcia-Teruel, "The Untold? True? Story That Inspired the Legend," in *Avalon Revisited: Reworkings of the Arthurian Myth*, ed. María José Álvarez Faedo (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p218.

[244] Arthur J. Droge, "Jesus and Ned Ludd: What's in a Name?," *Caesar: A Journal for the Critical Study of Religion and Human Values* 3, no. 1 (2009): 23-25.

[245] Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), p280.

[246] Arthur J. Droge, "Jesus and Ned Ludd: What's in a Name?," *Caesar: A Journal for the Critical Study of Religion and Human Values* 3, no. 1 (2009): 23-25.

[247] Karen L. King, "Factions, Variety, Diversity, Multiplicity: Representing Early Christian Differences for the 21st Century," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 3-4 (2011): 216-237.

[248] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p15.

[249] Einar Thomassen, "'Forgery' in the New Testament," in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, ed. Lewis and Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p145-146.

[250] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p15.

[251] Ibid., pp42,105.

[252] Romans 8:3-4.

[253] 1John 4:1-3.

[254] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p178.

[255] Clement, *The Stromata or Miscellanies, Volume 7* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 7.1.

[256] Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p17.

[257] Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ppxii,239.

[258] Galatians 4:4-7.

[259] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), pp390-391.

[260] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp207-218.

[261] Ibid., pp217,218.

[262] Alexander Roberts et al., eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp262,263.

[263] Alexander Roberts et al., eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1 (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), pp170,181.

[264] Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2010), pp247,305,439,593.

[265] Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Wars of the Jews* (Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2010), p272.

[266] Philostratus and C. P. Jones, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books 1-4* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 3.38-40.

[267] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp208,209.; It is also noteworthy that Philostratus, a known author, claims to have gathered information on Apollonius from a number of sources, including: letters and treatises from the hand of Apollonius himself, a history of Apollonius written by Maximus of Aegae, and memoirs written by Damis and furnished by Julia Domna, the wife of Roman Emperor Septimius Severus. Philostratus even goes so far as to mention his scepticism over Moeragenes' four books about Apollonius. By comparison, the anonymous Gospel accounts of Jesus only offer Luke 1:1-4 where no specific (and non-supernatural) sources are cited, and where scepticism and criticism is generally found wanting. See Philostratus and C. P. Jones, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books 1-4* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1.2-3.

[268] Peter Joseph, *Zeitgeist: The Movie* (Peter Joseph, 2007), Documentary film.

[269] Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Easter: Myth, Hallucination, or History? Part 1," *Christianity Today*, March 15, 1974, pp4-7.; Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Easter: Myth, Hallucination, or History? Part 2," *Christianity Today*, March 29, 1974, pp12-16.; Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus: A Journalist Investigates Current Attacks on the Identity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), pp164-169.

[270] Petra Pakkanen, *Interpreting Early Hellenistic Religion: A Study Based on the Mystery Cult of Demeter and the Cult of Isis* (Helsinki: Suomen Ateenan-Instituutin Säätiö, 1996),

pp2, 85, 100, 121, 136.

[271] Richard Carrier, *So… If Jesus Didn't Exist, Where Did He Come from Then?* (Madison, WI: Madison Area Coalition of Reason, 2012), Video recording.

[272] Ibid.

[273] John G. Gager, "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method," *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): 263.

[274] Richard Carrier, *So… If Jesus Didn't Exist, Where Did He Come from Then?* (Madison, WI: Madison Area Coalition of Reason, 2012), Video recording.

[275] Richard Carrier, *Not the Impossible Faith: Why Christianity Didn't Need a Miracle to Succeed* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2009), pp32,33,86,376.

[276] Plutarch and Frank Cole Babbitt, *Plutarch's Moralia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), Isis and Osiris 39,42.

[277] Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), pp55-81.

[278] Philip Schaff, ed. *Jerome: Letters and Select Works* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p380.

[279] Stephen Trzaskoma et al., eds., *Anthology of Classical Myth: Primary Sources in Translation* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004), p354.

[280] Marcus J. Borg and Ray Riegert, *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 1999), p13.

[281] Confucius and David Hinton, *The Analects* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1999), pp176,249.

[282] Barry B. Powell, *Classical Myth*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2008), pp267-271.

[283] Mark Csikszentmihalyi and P. J. Ivanhoe, *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), p29.

[284] Laozi and Stephen Mitchell, *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 49.

[285] Marcus J. Borg and Ray Riegert, *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 1999), p101.

[286] James Darmesteter, *The Zend-Avesta* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), 19.6.

[287] Siculus Diodorus and Charles Henry Oldfather, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.66.3.

[288] Marcus J. Borg and Ray Riegert, *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 1999), p149.

[289] Siculus Diodorus and Charles Henry Oldfather, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.38.4-5.

[290] Philip Schaff, ed. *St. Augustine: City of God, Christian Doctrine* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p51.; Robert M. Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), p335.

[291] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes: Book I* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p25.

[292] Otto Rank et al., *In Quest of the Hero: The Myth and Birth of the Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[293] Robert M. Price. "Christ a Fiction," accessed 10/07/2012, http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/robert_price/fiction.html.

[294] Robert Walter Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p35.

[295] Marvin W. Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p243,252.

[296] R. Joseph Hoffmann and D. J. Grothe, *R. Joseph Hoffmann - the Jesus Project* (Amherst, NY: Center for Inquiry, 2007), Audio recording.

[297] The Bible and Interpretation. "Did Jesus Exist?," accessed 11/09/2012, http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/dav368029.shtml.

[298] Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), pp13-14.

[299] Philo and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judæus: The Contemporary of Josephus, Translated from the Greek* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1854), On Dreams, That They are God-Sent 1.215.

[300] Ibid., On Dreams, That They are God-Sent 1.215.

[301] Ibid., The Special Laws, I, 81, On the Confusion of Tongues 62-63.

[302] Ibid., The Special Laws, I, 81.

[303] Ibid., On Dreams, That They are God-Sent 1.215.

[304] Richard Carrier, *Not the Impossible Faith: Why Christianity Didn't Need a Miracle to Succeed* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2009), p251.; Philo and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judæus: The Contemporary of Josephus, Translated from the Greek* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1854), On the Confusion of Tongues 146.

[305] Philo and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judæus: The Contemporary of Josephus, Translated from the Greek* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1854), Who is the Heir of Divine Things? 205-206, On the Life of Moses, II, 134.

[306] It is relevant that Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, most probably used the Septuagint extensively. And even the Hebrew versions name “Joshua”, which is the equivalent of “Jesus”.

[307] Richard Carrier, *Not the Impossible Faith: Why Christianity Didn't Need a Miracle to Succeed* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2009), p250.

[308] Ibid., p251.

[309] Joe E. Barnhart and Linda Kraeger, *In Search of First-Century Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p144.

[310] Professor of Religious Studies Hector Avalos unambiguously agrees. See Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007).

[311] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp42-46.; Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp56-57.

[312] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), pp77-85,92,97.

[313] Ibid., pp77-85,92,97.

[314] Ibid., p97,246.

[315] Richard Carrier. "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," accessed 05/05/2012, http://freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/1026.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Ibid.

[318] Carrier has yet more criticisms of Ehrman's recent work. See Richard Carrier. "Ehrman on Historicity Recap," accessed 11/09/2012, http://www.freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/1794.

[319] Conversely, if it could be proven that the 'Historical Jesus' did exist, Christian believers still face the inherent unlikelihood of the existence of their 'Christ of Faith'.

[320] USA Today. "Richard Dawkins to Atheist Rally: 'Show Contempt' for Faith," accessed 14/04/2012, http://content.usatoday.com/communities/Religion/post/2012/03/-atheists-richard-dawkins-reason-rally/1.; Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), pp15,25.

[321] Gager and Flusser speculate on the scant presence of Jesus' personal message in the New Testament, and also point to the importance of the teachings, which have "the potential to change our world". See John G. Gager, "Scholarship as Moral Vision: David Flusser on Jesus, Paul, and the Birth of Christianity," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 1 (2005): 66.

[322] Carl Sagan, *Encyclopaedia Galactica* (PBS, 1980), Television program.

[323] Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012), p118.

[324] Ibid., pp50,283,284.

[325] Not Homer the Greek poet, but that great Philosopher of Religion, Homer Simpson. I refer to this passage as Homer's Wager, an obviously playful alternative to Pascal's Wager. See Homer Simpson, *Homer the Heretic* (FOX, 1992), Television program.

[326] We should certainly prefer direct and exclusive empirical evidence of God's existence, but if we were to witness a miracle similar to what Elijah was involved with, we definitely ought to stand up and take notice. See 1Kings 18:16-45.

[327] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p37.

[328] Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism," *Philo* 4, no. 2 (2001): 195-215.

[329] I actually could produce an argument right now *proving* the existence of the God of naturalistic pantheism, but there would be no point, as in that case, 'God' is merely a synonym for 'the universe'. Clearly, that is not what most people, including most pantheists, think of when they consider the term, 'God'.

[330] William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), p54.

[331] Ibid., p74.

[332] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p111.

[333] Even physicists who assert that the universe 'came from nothing' assert that this 'nothing' is actually 'something'. See Lawrence Maxwell Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

[334] William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), p111.

[335] Victor J. Stenger, *God - the Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), pp148-149.

[336] Elliott Sober, "The Design Argument," in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William Mann (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), pp134-135.

[337] William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), p129.

[338] Arif Ahmed and William Lane Craig, *Is Belief in God More Reasonable Than Disbelief?* (La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2005), Audio CD.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Craig explains that God's existence is proven by the existence of objective morals and duties. His evidence for these objective moral standards comes from 'moral experience'. And these moral experiences are given to us by God. If that's not a circular argument, the Pope is not a Catholic. See William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), pp172-183.

[341] Arif Ahmed and William Lane Craig, *Is Belief in God More Reasonable Than Disbelief?* (La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2005), Audio CD.

[342] Paul Chadwick and Max Birchwood, "The Omnipotence of Voices. A Cognitive Approach to Auditory Hallucinations.," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 164, no. 2 (1994): 190-201.; Scott Atran and Joseph Henrich, "The Evolution of Religion: How Cognitive by-Products, Adaptive Learning Heuristics, Ritual Displays, and Group Competition Generate Deep Commitments to Prosocial Religions," *Biological Theory* 5, no. 1 (2010): 18-30.

[343] Christ on Campus Initiative. "Atheism: Five Arguments for God," accessed 06/11/2012, http://www.henrycenter.org/media/cci/Craig-Atheism.pdf.

[344] Graham Oppy, *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp53-57,238-242.

[345] Alvin Plantinga and James F. Sennett, *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), pp65-71.

[346] William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), pp219-262.

[347] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p42.; Bart D. Ehrman and Michael Licona, *Debate - Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?* (Matthews, NC: Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2009), DVD.; Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011), p59.; Richard Carrier, *Not the Impossible Faith: Why Christianity Didn't Need a Miracle to Succeed* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2009), pp32,33,86,376.; Einar Thomassen, "'Forgery' in the New Testament," in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, ed. Lewis and Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p141.; Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p235.; Arthur Droge goes so far as to say that Jesus is "probably apocryphal". See Arthur J. Droge, "Jesus and Ned Ludd: What's in a Name?," *Caesar: A Journal for the Critical Study of Religion and Human Values* 3, no. 1 (2009): 23-25.

[348] Eric Eve, "Meier, Miracle, and Multiple Attestation," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3, no. 1 (2005): 23-45.; Christopher Tuckett, "Sources and Methods," in *The*

Cambridge Companion to Jesus, ed. Bockmuehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p132-136.; Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p109.; John G. Gager, "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts About Method," *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1974): 260.; Craig A. Evans, *Life of Jesus Research: An Annotated Bibliography*, Rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p128.

[349] Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp211-214.

[350] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), pp24,287.; William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), pp182,265.

[351] Exodus 7:8-12.

[352] Sebastian Moll, *The Arch-Heretic Marcion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), pp47-71.

[353] That Jesus could have been or been raised by Baal is an interesting possibility, as Baal is obviously a ‘related god’ and was also said to have ‘returned to life’ after being defeated by Mot. See Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), pp55-81.

[354] Deuteronomy 32:8, Psalms 82:1.

[355] For more on the origins of Israel and the Old Testament, see Jonathan N. Tubb, *Canaanites* (London: British Museum Press, 1998).; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

[356] Old Testament expert John Day has written extensively on this issue. See John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

[357] There is much scholarship on this, but we can even figure this from the Old Testament itself. Exodus 15:11, as but one example, heavily implies that Yahweh is the greatest “among the gods”. See Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2002).

[358] John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection - Myth or Reality?: A Bishop's Search for the Origins of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

[359] Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002).

[360] There is quite a lot of scholarly support for the idea that ‘it is good to be good’. See Robert Axelrod, *The Complexity of Cooperation: Agent-Based Models of Competition and Collaboration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).; Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).